

"Be not ashamed, Christ has set us free"



PAYC
Bangkok
1997



REPORT

PAYC, Thailand
June/July '97



THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION

LUTHERISCHER WELTBUND - FEDERACIÓN LUTERANA MUNDIAL - FÉDÉRATION LUTHÉRIENNE MONDIALE

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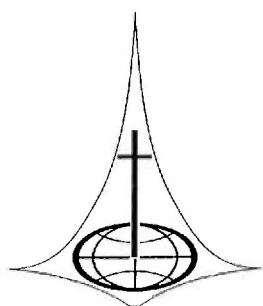
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PRE-ASSEMBLY YOUTH CONFERENCE (PAYC)

Bangkok, Thailand, June 29 - July 5, 1997

REPORT



Lutheran World Federation
Department for Mission and Development
Desk for Youth in Church and Society

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INTRODUCTION

Dear friends,

We hope this report will be a useful tool for your efforts to introduce the ideas and suggestions of the LWF Pre-Assembly Youth Conference (PAYC), Bangkok 1997 into the life and work of your local church or youth organization.

“Thuma Mina - Send me Lord,” the words of this African song were our prayer at the end of the PAYC. They expressed very well the spirit which filled our minds after the seven days of being together and discussing different issues concerning young people all over the world. The PAYC Message conveyed participants’ feelings faced with the variety of problems in today’s world by saying: “Youth feel powerless and unable to engage in active struggle for change”. It was not easy to find common solutions, given the different approaches shaped by our cultural differences.

However the prayer “Thuma Mina - Send me Lord”, which was with us from the first day of the conference and gradually gained its mysterious uniting power, became stronger than all the problems emerging from our discussions. The presentations and Bible studies made it clear to all of us that “Christ has set us free to live in this world and shape it into a more promising future” (PAYC Message §3). Our task did not end with the closing of the PAYC. On the contrary, our meeting in Bangkok made us aware of our continuing task as young Lutheran Christians in a new, much clearer light.

In our search for ways to deal with the challenges we realized that it was not easy to overcome our differences. But the firm conviction that we are sent to this world by our Lord who has set us free did not allow us to give up the search for common ground and common potentials. We were not ashamed of our different backgrounds and our experience together helped us in the end to exercise the freedom which Christ has given to us. We were free to share our weaknesses, fears and disappointments. But we were also free to receive encouragement and new ideas, and to open ourselves for new opportunities in the work and life of our churches. It was our faith in our Lord Jesus Christ which helped us to build the beautiful and enriching communion.

The experience we went through during the PAYC was surely a gift to all of us. It was a great opportunity to be mutually enriched by the power of the different spiritual gifts which each one of us brought to this meeting. It is now up to us whether we want to use this gift also in our daily life. The PAYC Bangkok will certainly be a nice memory for most of us who attended the conference. But it should be more. It should be a source of inspiration and energy whenever we think back to the days spent together. It should remind us of our responsibility to use and share all that we learned and received.

This report contains all the written contributions presented during the PAYC. We encourage you to use them in your local setting. The address list included in the report is intended to help you to stay in contact with each other. We have also included many photographs in order to refresh your visual memory and bring the atmosphere of the meeting back into your minds whenever you open this booklet.

Thuma Mina!

Ondrej Prostředník
Secretary for Youth in Church and Society

OPENING WORSHIP

The opening worship was prepared by youth from the host church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Thailand. Presiding minister was Bishop Rev. Sompong Hanpradit and the sermon was given by Rev. Banjob Kusawadee. Music was provided by a music group from the local church led by Viroje Ta-arsa. Students of the Lutheran Institute for Theological Education and young people from the local church performed a short cultural program presenting the PAYC participants with traditional Thai dancing and music. All this together with a meal shared after the worship, which is an usual part of Lutheran worship in Thailand, helped the participants, who arrived from different corners of the world, to build a living communion in Christ.



Rev. Banjob Kusawadee preaching

SERMON (excerpts)

Rev. Banjob Kusawadee
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Thailand

Text: 1 Peter 2:1-10

To our text today I have given the title "Proclaim the majesty of God".

Last year here in Thailand we had a big celebration as His Majesty the King of Thailand had been 50 years on the throne. On television, one of the King's long time servants was interviewed. He was asked about his wish for the future. His answer was very impressive. He said: "I am satisfied. I could not be more proud in my life. I do not need anything else in my life as I have been privileged to serve His Majesty."

The text in Peter's letter calls us to serve God by proclaiming his majesty. Then - what is this majesty which we are called to proclaim? First of all it is the honor, glory and greatness of God who is the Lord of the universe. Secondly, it is all that God has done and is doing. He has created everything. He loves his people. And he saves people.

The theme of the LWF Assembly in Hong Kong next month is "In Christ - Called to Witness". It says the same thing as our text today. Why do we have to proclaim the majesty of God?

We are called to proclaim the majesty of God because it is a matter of mercy. And what is mercy? When a person does something good to another person it is said that the receiver gets mercy from another person. It is thought that a good person is worthy of getting mercy. But Christians know another concept for mercy. We believe that we are sinners and worthless for any good gift and forgiveness. But God is merciful to all the people.

There is a story about three persons at the gate of heaven. They met Saint Peter one by one and were determined to enter heaven. The first one said that he had faithfully obeyed the Pope. Saint Peter asked him to stand by. The second person - I think he was a Baptist - claimed he had been baptized in the very right way. Saint Peter asked him also to stand by. The third person said that he had followed all the teachings of Martin Luther. Saint Peter did not allow him either to enter heaven. While standing and looking at the gate there together these three persons were very surprised as they saw a continuous flow of people entering heaven. The first one of them said, while waiting here couldn't we sing praise to the Lord who is the wonderful creator of everything. The second one said he would like them to sing praise to the Redeemer Jesus Christ who has delivered us from all evil. And the third one added his wish to praise the Holy Spirit who has enabled human beings to understand all this. So these persons started to sing. When Saint Peter heard their song he looked at them and called them to enter heaven.

Last night while thinking about our worship service here I remembered a dream I had one night when I was still a schoolboy. In that dream I was preaching to a big number of people who came from all over the world, from different nations and races. Last night I did not have a dream, but this morning we are here from different parts of the world and from all the continents. We have come together to proclaim the majesty of our Lord.

At the same time as we are here together singing the praise to our Lord there are thousands and thousands of people in our age who are suffering because other people are abusing their rights.

Some days ago there were terrible news in the newspaper. A woman, seven months pregnant, was forced to have sex with customers of a brothel. Suddenly she started to bleed and was rushed to hospital. And there is a big number of people suffering in different ways. I ask you to pray for our country and our people.

Our country is very beautiful and Thai people are kind and smiling. We welcome everyone here. I ask all of you to tell this in your countries when you go back home. But, please, tell them also our wish that nobody will come in order to have sex with our women and children.

We are called to proclaim the majesty of God. God wants to use us. He called Adam, Cain, Noah, Abraham, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, David and all the prophets. Jesus called twelve disciples. This time God calls you and me to proclaim his majesty.



Participants of PAYC celebrating the opening worship with the local church

PROUD TO SING

Song composed for PAYC and first performed during the opening worship

Words by Mr. Sampow Triudom

Music by Mr. Viroje Ta-arsa

D Em F#m

Here we all ge - ther round hold hands with a smile and walk side by side

G A D C G

to new day let's start some good things to - ge - ther all

D C G D Em

Here we all foll - ow him with love ne - ver fear

F#m G A D

to show that we trust in him. with his love so we live

C G A G

un - der his words Don't be shy be - cause we've been set free

A F#m B

and we're proud to sing and lift up his name with his spi

Em A D

- rit we keep in mind we'll ne - ver die we'll ne - ver fail

D7 G A/G

As long as we can live and sing so that peo - ple will

F#m B Em

be fol - low - ing we are his light we are his

A G D

chil - dren for - ev - er



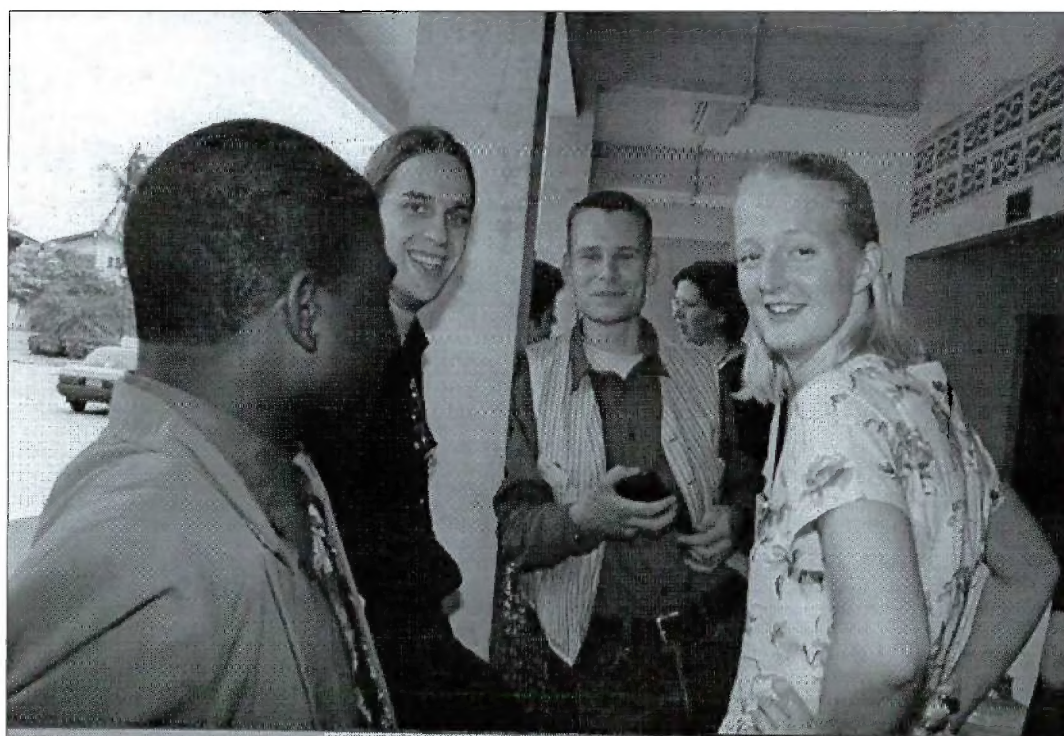
Traditional Thai music orchestra of the Lutheran Institute for Theological Education (LITE)



Group of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Thailand



PAYC participants gathering after the opening service



PAYC participants gathering after the opening service

OPENING PRESENTATIONS

The Pre-Assembly Youth Conference was officially opened by the Rev. Johan Ernstson, youth member of the outgoing LWF Council and member of the PAYC ad hoc preparatory group. The official opening which included prayer, Bible reading and an introduction to the PAYC program was followed by presentations from LWF staff explaining the aims of the conference.

OPENING ADDRESS

Agneta UCKO
LWF Deputy General Secretary

On behalf of LWF colleagues here present I would like to officially welcome all of you to this LWF Pre-Assembly Youth Conference.

I bring you greetings from the staff in Geneva and also greetings on behalf of the LWF member churches in other regions of the world. I bring you a special greeting from the General Secretary, Dr. Ishmael Noko, who had originally planned himself to address you here today. In connection with the historic event that is to take place in Hong Kong, he has been invited to attend the formal handover ceremony. Since the LWF is the first international meeting to take place in Hong Kong after the handover, he felt obliged to give priority to attend the ceremonies in Hong Kong. The General Secretary asked me to convey his apologies to all of you and also his best wishes for a fruitful meeting.



Pre-Assembly consultations have become an important instrument for preparing delegates for effective participation in the Assembly. Regional consultations have been organized by the Geneva secretariat for delegates from Europe, Asia, Africa, North America and Latin America. You who are delegates to the Assembly may have attended these regional Pre-Assemblies. As in these meetings, you will also during this conference receive specific information about the Assembly theme, the issues, the Bible studies, the worship life, communication, logistics and the parliamentary rules.

This Pre-Assembly gathering is however very special. First of all, it is an international conference. You are here together with young persons from all over the world. Secondly, this gathering carries a certain perspective into whatever is discussed, namely the youth perspective. There is sometimes a tendency to try to identify specific youth issues. I would say that what are youth issues are issues for all, but you carry as young women and men specific perspectives to all issues, which is very important. Thirdly, we have also, as participants in this conference, the stewards, young persons who will assist in facilitating the running of the Assembly. You will see and learn what goes on behind the scenes and be able to interact with the Geneva staff and local volunteers, and we hope that this will be a very special learning experience for you. Together, stewards and delegates, you will constitute 1/4 of the Assembly participants. This shows that we have reached some goals in numbers, but your full participation remains to be implemented. You have been given certain responsibilities for one of the plenaries, the "LWF Year 2000 and beyond," and the Closing Eucharist in the Assembly, but you are not restricted to these occasions. Your full participation in all the Assembly deliberations, in plenaries, groups and committees is very much expected.

The Assembly is the highest decision-making body of the Lutheran World Federation, and one of the important tasks of the Assembly is to give the direction for the work in the next seven years. As we this time also celebrate the 50 anniversary of the LWF, this is a special time for reflection on where we came from and where we are going.

This time is very important in the life of the LWF. There is a danger in only looking forward, giving directions for the future as much as there is a danger in only looking back, remembering, celebrating or repenting. The vitality

that could come out of the 50 years of history of the LWF would be to take the opportunity given at this time to build on the experience, positive and negative, of the history in the light of a new vision. I very much see you instrumental in making a new vision come through. Therefore, be reflective, brave and honest in your deliberations here and speak out in Hong Kong. We need your perspective on all the issues to move further. I will not further deliberate on the perspectives or challenges that are facing you as young women and men. I have three children myself, 18, 21 and 22 years old and we have in our family always respected the rule that everyone has the right to define him- or herself. I would therefore leave it to you to speak out on what you feel is important.

I would encourage you, when you interpret the theme of our Assembly, to do it in this context. "In Christ - Called to Witness" is our theme and I believe that it means something special to youth of today in Europe, Africa, Asia, Latin and North America.

We meet in Bangkok, Thailand. It is not by coincidence. It is on the way to Hong Kong, geographically of course but also contextually. It is Asia, and you will already here get a flavor of the continent that is hosting the LWF Ninth Assembly. The realities for many young people and children in Bangkok is sometimes difficult to face. Some of you have also been traveling last week in Thailand and have a story to tell in the area of human rights abuses. The church has an important ministry here. We have been worshiping together today and I already then expressed our thanks to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Thailand. Let me do it again and direct my gratitude to those who have been and are working hard behind the scene to make this event come through.

Let me end here by wishing God's blessing for all the deliberations during this LWF Pre-Assembly Conference and once again - welcome.



PAYC registration in the entrance hall of the Niran Grand Hotel

VISION OF LEADERSHIP

Dr. Péri RASOLONDRAIBE

Director LWF Department for Mission and Development

INTRODUCTION

It is indeed a great pleasure for me to be able to greet all of you here today. As many of you already know, this Pre-Assembly Youth Conference is the last of a series of its kind. The Department for Mission and Development (DMD) was in charge of the preparation of delegates to the ninth Assembly in Hong Kong. I had the joy to see some of you already in the Pre-Assembly Consultation in North America, Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America. Now we are all here! Special greetings to the stewards and the youth delegates who were not able to attend the regional Pre-Assembly Consultations. Also, on behalf of my colleagues in DMD, I extend a hearty greeting to you all. May this Pre-Assembly Youth Conference be as successful as the other five Pre-Assembly consultations.

It is indeed a great feeling to have this opportunity to be among the church of today. For, as I always say, the youth are the church today not the church of tomorrow. When our Assembly theme states: "In Christ: Called to Witness", I see here in front of me the real strength of those who are called to witness.



Allow me to reminisce just very briefly what it meant for me to be called to witness as a church youth. I belong to that group of people who grew up in and around the church and never felt at any time that I have left the church or that the church has left me. Sunday school, boy scouts, youth league, student fellowship, choir, they all helped me to witness. My first assignment as pastor was to work with the youth and students in one of the synods of my church, the Malagasy Lutheran Church. That was in 1969. If there was one theme that we, youth leaders of the time, did emphasize by working our programs around it was that of "freedom to act responsibly". I was delighted to learn that the theme of this conference is: "Don't be ashamed, Christ has set us free". This is your own way of saying: leadership for the 21st century belongs to responsible young people! And I applaud that.

We are called to witness! Agreed. But what are we doing here in Bangkok? This is a beautiful place for tourism and a booming spot for business, there is no doubt about that! But why are we here? One can think of several reasons but as DMD director I think of the following three important ones:

- (1) to prepare for the Assembly in Hong Kong,
- (2) to help DMD shape its youth program for the next seven years
- (3) to celebrate our life together as youth in the Lutheran communion.

1. To prepare for the Assembly

I believe that at the beginning of this Conference, Ms Agneta Ucko, the LWF Deputy General Secretary, explained to you what an Assembly was and what kind of business it was supposed to do. One of the main purposes of an Assembly is to set broad directions for the life and work of the Federation for the next seven years. When we talk about "life and work of the Federation" we think about three things: (1) the life and work of member churches at the local, national and regional levels, (2) the life and work of member churches as they witness together as a communion at the global level, (3) the work of the General Secretariat in Geneva, as it endeavors to serve churches and communities around the world.

As you are the church of today, the Lutheran communion considers your inputs to be extremely valuable. In all the issues to be discussed, either in the villages or in the plenaries, please lift up your voice and let your concerns and visions be heard. As the Apostle Paul said, "Do not let anyone look down on you because you are young, but be an example for the believers in your speech, your conduct, your love, faith, and purity" (I Timothy 4:12). In other words, bring forward your vision of leadership for the 21st century and put its stamp on all the issues. There will be a message written for the churches at the end of the Assembly, let us make sure that the voice of youth be heard loud and clear.

The ten issues that you will be discussing in the villages can be summed up in three concerns:

(1) **What does it mean to be a Communion in Christ?** This involves issues 1 and 2, which deals with **Church Unity** and **Communion in a Divided World**. The Federation needs a strong Christian boldness in love and freedom to enable it to move forward to a deeper meaning of communion and unity. Thus, we rely on the courage and faith of our young people to help concretize the saying: "To be Lutheran is to be ecumenical".

(2) **How is Communion reflected in a living community?** This includes issues 4, 5, 6, on **Gender, Youth and Culture**. Youth delegates are to challenge the whole Assembly to reflect on how the church can be truly a living community, that is, an inclusive, participatory and enabling community. A living community is where everyone has a place and a role to play, everyone has a share to receive and a share to give. The diversity of culture should not be seen as or made into a dividing factor but rather an enriching experience for the community, bringing it to a fullness of life, saving it from monotony and boredom.

(3) **How do we witness as a community?** This includes issues 3, 7, 8, 9, 10. We are called to witness through **mission and dialogue**, through the **information highways**, through the **care of God's creation**, through **service** and through **advocacy for justice, human rights, peace and reconciliation**. There are many ways to witness. There may be other ways that you, as young people, have thought of beyond those that are given in the issue preparations. Please, don't be ashamed to stand up in your village group and share them. Remember, the leadership into the 21st century is in your hands.

In addition to your contributions to issues discussion, there is a task that the Assembly assigned to you, namely, a special hearing on how you see the future of the LWF in the year 2000 and beyond. I know that at the regional Pre-Assembly Consultations, youth delegates and stewards already met to discuss the content and the way to present this hearing. We are eager to hear from you. I would like, however, to give you a technical tip. Your hearing session comes in the evening of July 14, that is after the Assembly message has been drafted by the editorial committee. For your vision to be part of that message, it is important that you give a manuscript of your presentation to the chairperson of the editorial committee before Saturday, July 12, or see to it that the main focus of your hearing session be included in the report of the Youth Village.

2. LWF/DMD Youth Program

The mandate of DMD is to work closely with member churches to strengthen their programs and projects for Proclamation, Advocacy, Fellowship and Service. DMD is to help strengthen an inclusive and holistic ministry among the churches. In particular we are responsible for assisting the youth to be part of the decision making processes in church and society.

As many of you may know already, the LWF Youth Desk, which is one of the eleven desks in DMD, has organized different consultations and workshops on the global, regional and sub-regional levels to sharpen youth leadership on different specific issues. Recently there has been emphasis on AIDS information, and on new religious phenomena in some parts of the world. Many of you know of the internship program through which DMD sponsors young people to gain experiential knowledge of the life and work of the Federation. A most recent program was the **Young Women Leadership Training**, a three-year program which started in 1994 and was accompanied by all DMD desks. There are now strong recommendations from member churches that we continue to offer this program in the future.

We are aware in DMD that there are so many things that churches would wish us to do with them concerning youth work. Of course, we would not be able to do all of them. Where should our concentration be? This is what we expect from you as you meet here in Bangkok. Let us know about the concerns, the visions, and the challenges that you wish to address together with your churches. You can even suggest programs, long-range or short-range, or different kinds of networking. Give us your innovative views of how to foster creative unconventional leadership in the churches and we will look for ways to shape them into programs.

3. Celebrate our Togetherness

We are here not only to do business, but also to celebrate. We are here to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Federation; an organization which has grown from a cluster of churches in 1947 to a worldwide communion in 1997. We celebrate the diversity we enjoy in this communion. We really capture the biblical teaching on the freedom of the children of God, which Lutherans cherish so much, when we can celebrate our being One family in the Lord and at the same time celebrate the diversity among us.

We are celebrating 17 years of Youth Desk at the LWF Secretariat. The desk is still young and there is a lot we need to be doing, but for what God helped us to do and for those who made those happen, let's celebrate.

We are celebrating being together here as bright, intelligent, strong, healthy, faithful and above all YOUNG people! Let us use this time together to foster a bond between the continents and the churches. Let our celebration through laughters, songs and dances cast away shadows of divisions and isolation.

Let us celebrate a vision of leadership shaped by the youth. This has already begun in society. More and more the idea that age means wisdom is now being replaced by the insight that informed youth brings creativity and vision. Now more people would agree that what really counts in today's leadership is not age but mileage, not how long you have lived but how well you are informed and in the words of Corneille, the French writer, "Aux âmes bien nées, la valeur n'attend point le nombre des années", which can be paraphrased to mean: the value of a well bred person does not depend on his or her age. We are delighted to know that in the last decade the average age of government leaders and industry top executives around the world has been lowered tremendously. As we celebrate that, we need to push for more leadership positions given to young people in our churches and church organizations.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, I would like to express gratitude and appreciation to different groups of people at this point since I have to leave before the end of this conference, to attend the Council meeting in Hong Kong.

First of all, allow me to express my gratitude to our **host**, the **Evangelical Lutheran Church in Thailand**. This church is a young but dynamic church and we appreciate the efforts and the help provided to make this conference run smoothly. I would also like to express appreciation to the **stewards** who will be working very hard in Hong Kong. May you find joy and satisfaction as you serve the church in that capacity.

I would also like to say thank you to the **presenters, the interpreters, and the local staff** for making sure that this conference achieves what it was meant to achieve.

Finally, I would like to say thank you to all the participants, the delegates and advisors and Council members for working so hard in the groups and making this gathering an enjoyable experience.

Thank you also to DMD staff who organized and accompanied this conference for the last two years and made it a successful one.

Thank you everyone and see most of you in Hong Kong.



Convention Hall in Hong Kong, venue of the Eighth LWF Assembly 1997

CALLED TO BE THE VISION

The LWF Program for Youth in Church and Society between the two Assemblies
Ondrej Prostředník, LWF/DMD Secretary for Youth in Church and Society

1 — Introductory remarks

Dear friends, dear participants of the LWF Pre-Assembly Youth Conference, dear guests,



I would like to welcome you here in Bangkok with the words from the Acts of the Apostles 2:17:

In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. (NRSV)

These words of the prophet Joel were used by the Apostle Peter when the foundation of the church were laid about 2000 years ago. Since then the people living under the guidance of the Holy Spirit have been blessed by many visions leading the Christian church through history. Today we are the generation which is called to have a vision for the future of the church.

To be able to formulate this vision we shall now spend a few moments looking back on the past. Since we are meeting here in Bangkok as representatives of the LWF member churches, we will limit our journey through the past to the period when the LWF existed and focus specifically on youth.

We are holding our meeting here in Bangkok on almost the same dates as the First LWF Assembly in Lund was held 50 years ago, namely from June 30 - July 6, 1947. This Assembly adopted the following resolution concerning youth:

7. Believing that Christ Jesus is the answer to the sins and sorrows disillusionments and discouragements, hopes and aspirations, of the youth of today's world, and recognizing the present strategic opportunity of the Church both to proclaim the saving Gospel of Christ to youth, and to utilize the Church's youth in active Christian service be it

Resolved, that we call upon our Lutheran Churches everywhere to give continued and increasing attention to their youth programs; that we call upon our youth organizations, as serving arms of the Church in soul-winning and soul-keeping, to hold high the torch of faith; and that we encourage our youth to reach out the hand of Christian fellowship, especially to our Lutheran Youth throughout the world, that unitedly they may express effectively their common faith and devote themselves to common tasks.

The First LWF Assembly in Lund also created a Commission of Youth Activities as one of its five commissions or departments.

As you can see, the concern for youth has been present on the LWF agenda since its establishment in 1947. But in the 50 years since its creation, the approach of the Federation and its member churches to youth concerns has changed substantially. From being an object of the churches concern, young people have become active participants in shaping the work and life of the LWF.

Participation of youth in the LWF Assemblies originates in the decision of the Second LWF Assembly in Hanover in 1952. The decision was made that youth be given full opportunity to participate in the next and following assemblies.

This significant step towards participation of youth was not achieved until the Fifth LWF Assembly in Evian in 1970. After the famous youth pre-assembly called WELY (World Encounter of Lutheran Youth), attended by 49 young people, seven participants of the meeting were called to the Steering Committee of the Assembly in Evian.

The next step toward stronger participation of youth was taken at the Seventh LWF Assembly in Budapest in 1984. Resolution 7.1.5. decided that a regionally and gender balanced key be utilized for delegates for the next Assembly and that at least 20% of the delegates be youth. After the Assembly in Budapest youth have been represented in all

LWF Commissions. Two representatives of youth were also appointed to the LWF Executive Committee as consultants without voting rights.

Finally, the Eight LWF Assembly in Curitiba in 1990 elected seven youth delegates as full members of the LWF Council, the highest decision-making body between assemblies. Some of these Council members are now among us in this meeting and will report to you about their period of service between 1990 and 1997.

But we don't want to talk only about the past. You know that we are meeting here in Bangkok in order to prepare ourselves for the LWF Ninth Assembly in Hong Kong. This Assembly will be very much influenced by the 50th anniversary of the Lutheran World Federation. We, as young people from the LWF member churches, have been invited to become part of what we might call the LWF birthday party. As in all other birthday parties, we will express our wishes to the one we are celebrating.

Those of you who took part in the regional pre-assemblies know that this time the young people are invited to play a very special role in the Assembly. Young people have been asked to present their vision for the LWF in the year 2000 and beyond. What are we going to wish the Federation for the future? How do we see the next years of its existence? How are we going to use this unique tool for experiencing and building up the communion of Lutheran churches throughout the world? These are some of the questions we should ask ourselves as we prepare for the Assembly in Hong Kong.

2 The LWF Program for Youth in Church and Society and its purpose

General objectives of the program are: to strengthen youth/young adults' ministry in LWF member churches through activities which utilize the international network and to increase the participation of young people in the life and work of the churches and the LWF. Methods are conferences, workshops, exchanges, study programs, visits, communication - all aiming at communion and network-building.

The program has a strong emphasis on issues related to young peoples' lives in church and society and, as such, can be seen as a global think tank for the development of youth work.

The program is for young adults, 18 to 30 years old, who are either youth leaders or agree to serve in their churches as multipliers based on their international experience.

The program is based on the understanding that the youth ministry in the churches has to be encouraged and nurtured so that the young people, as part of the people of God, can lift up their voices and become recognized and respected parts of the life of the churches. The existence and the activities of the Youth Desk are intended to conscientize the churches and their youth to the question of youth participation in the LWF and in church governing bodies. This is the advocacy role of the program.

Specific emphasis is on activities with enlarged or full participation of geographical regions/sub-regions in the planning, preparation, implementation and follow-up. The planning and implementation have an important leadership training element.

Establishing and supporting regional networks is also one of the basic purposes of the Youth Program. It is envisioned that the long-term effect will be that more activities will be planned and priorities set in the regions. This might be an element in the process of regionalisation of the LWF. Youth networks should be linked to the respective church structures in the region. This is necessary in order to move towards more inclusive programs and decision-making at all levels. To achieve this, stronger cooperation is also foreseen at the LWF secretariat level. When the structures are in place and functioning, more time would be available in Geneva for overall coordinating and program development.

3 Program activities after the Eight LWF Assembly in Curitiba

In one of our mailings we have provided you with a list of Youth Desk Activities between 1990-1996. The following section is meant to give you more information about the background, the objectives and the results of respective sections of the LWF Youth Program.

3.1 Youth Representation in the LWF Council

The youth representation in the LWF Council is one of the most significant achievements in the history of the LWF Youth Program. During the lifetime of the LWF Youth Program the youth have moved from being the object of the program to being the leaders and decision makers in the highest LWF decision-making body between assemblies.

In the last period, the youth constituency has been represented in the LWF Council through seven young adults. Most of them are present among us and will share their experiences about the period of their service as well as their visions for the future youth representation on the LWF Council with you. This will happen later in the program of the conference.

3.2 Regional and Subregional Consultations

Regional and sub-regional consultations have served as an opportunity to share experiences with challenges related to church and society and youth programs in the member churches. In general these consultations were organized as separate three to five day meetings for youth, prior to conferences involving churches' representatives.

Nine regional consultations and one sub-regional consultation have been organized in the period since the last LWF Assembly. While the regional consultations are mentioned in the list of Youth Desk activities, the last sub-regional consultation took place only recently and could not be included to the list. This was the LUCWA (Lutheran Communion in Western Africa) Youth Consultation in Ngaoundere, Cameroon (January 16-20, 1997) under the theme "Founded in Christ To Build Together." A need for a functioning subregional Lutheran youth network was very strongly expressed by the participants of this consultation.

3.3 Study on Themes requiring Regional Cooperation

3.3.1 Buddhism

The purpose of this program was to conduct a study on themes which cannot be adequately explored by a single church and which needs regional cooperation. As one of such areas identified by the PAYC in Buenos Aires (1990), was the attractiveness of other spiritualities and religions. Based on this, the Study Program on Religious Dialogue was implemented by the Youth Desk.

A study tour, "Western Youth in the East," took place in Thailand and Nepal in February 1993 with 11 participants from 11 countries/churches. As a follow-up a Buddhist Study Visit to Birmingham, Great Britain (April 19-24, 1996), was organized. The objectives of the concluding second phase were to study the impact of Buddhist monasteries and centers on communities in the West and to examine the response of the Christian churches to their presence. Since Buddhism is the fastest growing religion in the United Kingdom, it seemed to be the most suitable place for this study. The program was prepared in cooperation with the Westhill R.E. Centre of Westhill College at Selly Oak, Birmingham. An important part of the program were lectures on Buddhism given by a Buddhist lay person, focusing on a comparison between selected Buddhist and Christian texts and introducing participants to basic meditation techniques. Further, the program consisted of visits and meetings with local Buddhist communities. Participants were those who took part in the first phase, the DMD youth intern from Colombia, one resource person and the Youth Desk staff.

3.3.2 HIV/AIDS

Participants in the 1990 Youth Pre-Assembly expressed their strong concern regarding AIDS in the final document. This concern initiated the planning and implementation of the HIV/AIDS Awareness- raising Program.

The purpose of the program was:

- To continue the process of identifying obstacles to and possibilities for church youth work to deal with issues related to HIV/AIDS in the different regions;
- to work specifically with the ethical aspects, and identify the churches' contribution to the fight against the spread of HIV/AIDS;
- to continue the process of identifying concrete ways in which the youth in the churches might take action in church and society to show solidarity with people affected by HIV/AIDS;
- to support initiatives in the churches and regions which aim at meeting the above objectives.

Concerns of youth regarding HIV/AIDS were expressed also by the Africa Lutheran Youth Consultation in 1992. As a result of this consultation a workshop on HIV/AIDS education was organized jointly with the WCC Youth Team in 1993. The concrete result of the workshop was the leaflet "Youth -- AIDS, why we care", with texts prepared by the participants, and produced later in English, French, Spanish, Portuguese and German in Geneva. The leaflet was meant as a discussion-starter, giving a global impression of the complexity of HIV/AIDS related issues. In addition, a resource book, "Making connections - facing AIDS" was initiated. The text was prepared by resource persons and participants and edited in Geneva. Initially, this program was seen as a part of the sub-regionalization in Africa and an AIDS network was formed to follow up on the issue in the churches in the sub-region.

The second AIDS Workshop took place on May 17-21, 1996, in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, as part of the Youth Desk "Study and Awareness-raising Program on HIV/AIDS." The aim of the workshop was to encourage and assist member churches in dealing with the HIV/AIDS issue and to involve youth workers in the HIV/AIDS awareness-raising programs. The workshop dealt with issues like 1) Christianity, Culture and AIDS; 2) HIV/AIDS Education;

and 3) Human Sexuality. The Zimbabwe Health Department gave an overview of the situation in Zimbabwe and in Africa in general and a doctor presented a clinical perspective. There was also an exposure program including visits to institutions dealing with HIV/AIDS. Participants were youth workers from LWF member churches in Southern Africa, members of the LWF African AIDS Network, guests from Uganda and Kenya, two resource persons and Youth Desk staff.

As a follow-up to this workshop, series of local youth workshops were organized in Zimbabwe, Malawi and Kenya dealing with HIV/AIDS awareness raising among youth. They were organized and implemented with financial assistance of the LWF Youth Desk. Since 1996 the Youth Desk also has been involved in the coordination of the LWF Staff Working Team on AIDS, an advisory body within the LWF Secretariat. This team is dealing with exchange of in-house information on HIV/AIDS related issues, collection of information from member churches about their involvement in HIV/AIDS, providing expertise, knowledge or information to facilitate appropriate action, and with submitting recommendations regarding conferences or workshops.

3.4 Activities in Member Churches and Regional Networks

As a planned result of the sub-regional consultations, youth networks were established in the regions or sub-regions, depending on the needs identified in the regions. So far, networks have been established in Latin America and Southern Africa (since this is an issue-oriented network on AIDS, it is placed under the Study Program). The recent Sub-regional Youth Consultation in Ngaoundere, Cameroon (January 1997), established a youth network. Plans for concrete activity are being developed in cooperation with the LWF Regional Office in Africa and the LWF Youth Desk.

However, it is necessary to state that the functioning of the established networks was not very satisfactory. The main difficulty is the natural fact of frequent rotation of persons involved in the regional youth structures. It is not always possible to secure continuation of the work and contacts with the LWF Youth Desk once the person involved locally leaves the youth structure. Part of the problem can also be seen to be the relatively long vacancy at the LWF Youth Desk between the last and the current Secretary for Youth in Church and Society. Since our youth networks depend almost exclusively on volunteer work of local persons, strong personal ties within the region and with the Youth Secretary are vital for the functioning of the network. This should be taken into consideration as we plan for the future of LWF youth networks.

The main purpose of this program was to support regional networks and program initiatives in and between member churches which, preferably, involve several youth groups or congregations in order to strengthen the youth constituency. The activity should have an international aspect and be endorsed by the member church/es involved.

In the period since 1990, 24 different activities in the networks and member churches have been supported by the LWF Youth Desk. To the list distributed the following should be added:

Lutheran Youth Meeting in Varalja, Hungary, July 1997, National Youth Assembly in Malawi, October 1996, and National Youth Congress in the Malagasy Lutheran Church, August 1997.

3.5 Youth Internship

From 1980, the LWF Youth Internship Program has given young adults the possibility to learn from and contribute to the life of the LWF. Emphasis has been on the LWF headquarters with a few placements in World Service Field Offices and in member churches.

The purpose of the program is:

- To offer a chance to contribute to and to learn from the ministry of the LWF headquarters, World Service (WS) field programs and member churches.
- To provide the LWF with resource persons who can contribute, especially in the field of LWF youth involvement.
- To give young people an opportunity to develop skills within a department where it is possible to combine their educational background or work experience with projects, studies and program activities of the department and of the LWF as a whole.
- To provide an international ecumenical experience for young persons so that they may be better equipped to contribute to the life and work of the church from a global perspective.

In the period since Curitiba two interns have been involved in the internship between churches, one intern served in the Lutheran Office for World Community in New York, two interns served in the field offices of LWS and 9 interns served in the Geneva LWF secretariat. In most cases the LWF interns are now serving in important leadership positions of their respective churches and thus showing that the internship program has a direct positive impact on youth empowerment for the service in the church.

The Youth Internship Program is one of our most attractive and demanded programs and it has not been possible to respond positively to all applications.

3.6 Youth Publications

The Youth Newsletter has gradually been developed over the years into the LWF *Youth Magazine*. It is being distributed to 2,600 readers worldwide, many of whom have attended LWF youth-sponsored activities. A lot of resources has gone into developing layout as well as content the last few years to make it an attractive and challenging means of communication between the secretariat and the global constituency.

The purpose of *Youth Magazine* is to share:

- articles and interviews on youth concerns within social, political and religious issues;
- testimonies, opinions and reactions from young people in the churches on current issues;
- news in brief, mentioning internationally significant youth-related events/dimensions of a spiritual, social, and political nature;
- articles reporting on LWF-sponsored events thus sharing the outcome.

There have been 13 issues of *Youth Magazine* since Curitiba. During the last year we have updated our address list removing the old addresses and creating space for adding new ones without increasing the number of copies to be printed. Each issue is thematically focused. The two issues in 1996 dealt with Street Children and with Buddhism. The last issue, no 41, is focusing on young refugees. *Youth Magazine* is a useful tool for spreading information to our constituency and we have received many positive reactions.

3.7 Leadership Training and Development

3.7.1 Stewards Program

Leadership Training and Development has been an important part of the LWF Youth Program since Curitiba. Besides the Youth Internship program, the Stewards program has become an important tool for leadership training.

As a result of the restructuring of the LWF, the LWF Council has met annually since 1990. The reshaping of the decision-making structures led to the decision to hold one large annual meeting instead of having smaller commissions. The stewards program was developed in response to the new situation as a means to facilitate the running of the meeting as well as to give young people the opportunity to be exposed to the life of the LWF. A Pre-Council program was organized consisting of an issue-oriented workshop and briefing on Council matters and tasks. Emphasis was put on introducing the stewards to the Council and Committees' agendas to increase their participation in the meeting.

The purpose of the program is:

- To assist (through necessary information and involvement in the planning of the youth program's activities) youth representatives in the LWF Council in their task to represent youth and their churches;
- to strengthen youth participation in LWF Council meetings through the presence and service of an internationally recruited group of stewards;
- to use opportunities given in the activities and programs of the LWF to expose young people to the life and tasks of the Federation and thereby develop interest and knowledge for present and future involvement in the communion.

3.7.2 Young Women Leadership Training Program

The three-year international training of young women initiated in the Department for Mission and Development started in 1994 and ended in 1996. The program was implemented jointly by all DMD staff but the Youth Desk and the Women's Desk shared the responsibility for coordinating and doing the individual follow up.

The aim of the training was to support the member churches by providing leadership skills to a group of women in their churches upon whom they may call as resource persons. With joy we can say that several participants in these program are among the delegates of the LWF Ninth Assembly and some will become members of the next LWF Council.

Out of 45 women 43 completed their three-year training. During 1995, regional meetings took place and throughout the whole three-year period, participants were encouraged to develop their potential for leadership through seminars, internships, visits to churches, participation in LWF meetings and a counseling network of regional coordinators

and local mentors who accompanied the women in their training. The program of the final event, which was attended by 39 of the women, included issues such as Gender and Theology, Gender and Culture, Gender, Leadership and Development, Networking, Church, Women and Media, "To be a Woman". Except for a guest presenter for Bible studies and a resource person for evaluation, the participants themselves facilitated all sessions, including the daily worship which took place in the Chapel of the Ecumenical Center and was open to all staff.

A full report of this program will be available in September 1997 from the DMD. This program can be seen as a pilot program and it would be good if the PAYC participants could discuss the question of organizing a similar program in the future.

3.8 Participation of youth in international activities

An important role of the LWF Youth Program in the period after Curitiba was to foster global awareness among church youth. This was done by securing international participation in national events, representation of church youth in secular or ecumenical international activities, etc.

The purpose of this program was to promote youth participation in ecumenical and secular international activities if endorsed by a member church or upon invitation submitted to the LWF.

With this program the Youth Desk was able to respond to 17 requests for assistance for youth to participate in ecumenical and secular activities.

3.9 Human Rights Visitations

Human Rights Visitations were a strong part of the LWF Youth Program in the period before the last Assembly in Curitiba. The Final Document from the last LWF PAYC in Buenos Aires states:

That the LWF should be concerned about the human rights problems in Hong Kong and share the relevant information with all member churches and that the LWF should hold a youth and students conference in Hong Kong to study the issues and find some way to help the church in Hong Kong to face the problem from now to 1997 and beyond. (From the Final Document of LWF PAYC, Buenos Aires, 1990).

As you can see this concern was taken so seriously by the LWF that next week not only the youth but all LWF member churches represented through their delegates will gather in Hong Kong for the LWF Ninth Assembly.

While in the years 1986-88 several visitation programs were organized by the LWF Youth Desk there has been only one visitation program in the period after 1990 for various reasons, mainly time and resources, despite the fact that the evaluation meeting following the 1990 Youth Pre-Assembly recommended that visitations take place in the Middle East, Central America and Asia (Taiwan and Hong Kong mentioned specifically). The one visitation program organized, The Human Rights Visit to Bangkok and Northern Thailand, will be reported to you in a special section of our program since it took place only few days ago and participants of this program are all among us here.

3.10 Children

The issue of children's rights has been present on the LWF agenda for several years. A Staff Working Team on Children chaired by the LWF Secretary for Human Rights and International Affairs was then later in 1995 merged with the Staff Working Team for Children and Youth and is chaired by the LWF Secretary for Youth. The Youth Desk was involved in monitoring the international discussion on the rights of the child and attended several UN meetings dealing with this subject. The information collected was processed and shared with the colleagues concerned.

The future involvement of the Youth Desk in the issue of children's rights should be considered by the PAYC. The question how the Youth Desk through its regional networks can help the youth structures in the member churches to become involved in protecting the rights of children is of special importance.

4 Challenges for the future period

Among the challenges already mentioned which are arising from the experience gained from the work in the period since the last Assembly there are new challenges which should be considered by the PAYC and discussed as possible areas of future work of the LWF Youth Program.

4.1 Youth Structures and the church

How to include youth in the life of church and society giving them the possibility of full participation and inviting them to offer their talents to the witness of the church is the central question of the church youth work.

4.2 The charismatic movement

The charismatic movement is reaching more and more churches. The questions are: How may our churches include and not exclude young people who are seeking an honest Christian life? How can the older generation in the church improve its communication with young people, so that they can be helped to articulate their criticisms of the church in a constructive way?

4.3 Worship

Worship is the place where the church, as the body of Christ, is meeting and experiencing the power and the blessing of being together, gathered around the word and sacrament. Youth presence and active participation in worship is a reliable sign of a sound congregational life. How can we create worship models which include the

participation of young people, but which do not create a youth-oriented worship that excludes other groups in the congregation?

4.4 Other religions

While some churches have a good percentage of active young people, many churches, especially in European and North American countries, experience a declining youth membership. Many young people do not regard the church as a place in which to invest their energy, but instead turn to some form of "youth culture", other religions or are attracted to the "New Age" movements. How can the church become a relevant alternative for young people seeking love and fellowship in other religions? How can the church help young people cope peacefully with the presence of foreigners?

4.5 The ecumenical movement

Young people's questions and creativity have contributed much to the shaping of the ecumenical movement and the issues it brings forward. Young people have participated in expanding the definition of the movement. Ecumenically minded young people have influenced denominational youth work. However in its 1994 statement "Crisis and Challenge of the Ecumenical Movement", the Institute for Ecumenical Research in Strasbourg is talking about the difficulties the ecumenical movement is having with its own accomplishments. How can young people become involved in an effective reception process of the ecumenical accomplishments of the ecumenical movement in their churches?

4.6 The information society

One of the major challenges for youth work is the progressing information technology. The Internet which was originally designed as an information tool for exchanging research information among academic institutions worldwide has in a few years changed into a public information network with easy access for millions of users. The churches are challenged not only to become users of this modern tool of communication but also to become involved when it comes to ethical issues concerning the use of Internet and World Wide Web. How can young people become active participants in these process rather than passive users of the information facilities?

These are some of the challenges seen from the perspective of the LWF. However it is hoped that these challenges will be discussed and some more will be spelled out by the PAYC participants.

5 Conclusion

Let me conclude with words of thanks to all of you who have come to this meeting. Many of you had to go through several difficulties to get here. To make this trip required a lot of courage and strength from you. Some of those invited were not even able to make it to Bangkok because of different obstacles, such as visa problems and unrest which led to the closing of airports..

You were sent by your churches and asked to represent the youth in the LWF Pre-Assembly Youth Conference in Bangkok and in the LWF Ninth Assembly in Hong Kong. Some of you come as stewards, the others as delegates. Later in the program you will have an opportunity to learn what is expected from each of these categories of participants in the Assembly in Hong Kong. But both, stewards and delegates as well as guests from the region and ecumenical guests, have the one and the same task here in Bangkok: To help each other prepare for Hong Kong and to make the voice of youth sound clear, strong and constructive in the LWF Ninth Assembly. Our meeting in Bangkok should be seen mainly as a means of preparation and not as our ultimate goal. We came to Bangkok in order to prepare for Hong Kong.

You have the mandate to represent the youth of your churches. This is a very important task which requires responsibility. This is a great chance for us to bring the concerns of youth to the attention of the Lutheran church leaders and with our voice and vote suggest and decide about action needed to change visions into reality.

I would like to say words of appreciation to all of you who have accompanied us in our preparations for this meeting at the Youth Desk with your cooperation and your prayers. Words of thanks go also to the local committee and the host church. We have tried our best during the last almost two years of preparations. Now its your turn to make this meeting a productive, memorable, and enriching experience.

YOUTH DESK ACTIVITIES 1990 - 1996

1. LWF COUNCIL MEMBERS REPRESENTING YOUTH:

At the LWF Assembly in Curitiba 1990, seven young adults were elected to the LWF Council (highest decision-making body between assemblies) for the period 1990-1997:

- Ms. Mercedes Garcia-Bachmann, Argentina
- Ms. Janet T. Calado, The Philippines
- Mr. Johan Ernstson, Sweden
- Ms. Boua Sy Ly Huneycutt, USA
- Ms. Anna Makyao, Tanzania
- Mr. Johannes Mayer, Italy - later exchanged with Ms. Birgit Kelm, Italy
- Ms. Agnes Pangyanszky, Hungary

2. REGIONAL AND SUBREGIONAL CONSULTATIONS:

April 7-11, 1991 Evaluation Meeting of LWF Youth Program, including evaluation on Pre-Assembly Youth Conference in Buenos Aires 1990. Participants: former Ad-hoc Youth Committee, former commission members and some new Council members;

April 25-27, 1991 Youth Meeting prior to Asian Mission Consultation in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Participants: sixteen youth leaders representing eleven churches in six Asian countries;

April 21-25, 1992 African Lutheran Youth Consultation in Limuru, Kenya, organized by the Youth Desk. Participants: twenty youth leaders representing LWF member churches in Africa;

May 20-25, 1992 Latin American Youth Consultation in Santiago, Chile, organized in the region with financial support and assistance from the Youth Desk. Theme: "500 Years, Repentance, Reflection, Celebration." Participants: youth from LWF member churches in Latin America;

October 31-November 4, 1992 European Lutheran Youth Consultation "Let the Homeless Poor into Your House." Participants: thirty young adults representing Lutheran churches in Europe;

July 18-25, 1993 Central and East European Youth Conference in Budapest, Hungary, organized by the Youth Desk in cooperation with the Hungarian youth organization MEVISZ. Theme: "It is good for us to be here." Participants: about eighty youth from Central and Eastern Europe and some twenty Hungarian stewards and musicians;

June 8-15, 1994 First phase of the LWF Leadership Training Program for Younger Women 1994-97 in Bossey, Switzerland. Organized by the LWF Department for Mission and Development. Participants: 44 women leaders from Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin and North America;

May 20-26, 1995 Asian Lutheran Youth Conference in Antipolo (near Manila), Philippines, organized by the Youth Desk and hosted by the Lutheran Church in the Philippines. Theme: "Building Bridges: Towards and Asian Solidarity." Participants: some thirty young Lutherans from LWF member churches in Asia;

October 20-26, 1996 Final Event of LWF Leadership Training Program for Younger Women 1994-97 in Geneva, Switzerland. Participants: as above

3. STUDY ON THEMES REQUIRING REGIONAL COOPERATION

February 5-19, 1993 Buddhist Study Tour to Nepal and Thailand organized by the Youth Desk in cooperation with the Danish Dialogue Center to study the attractiveness of other religions. Participants: eleven young adults from North America and Europe;

May 5-12, 1993 HIV/AIDS Workshop in Windhoek, Namibia jointly organized by the Youth Desk and the World Council of Churches (WCC) Youth Team. LWF participants: ten young adults from Southern African countries; WCC participants: ten youths from Africa, Asia, Caribbean, North America and the Pacific;

April 19-24, 1996 Buddhist Study Tour to Birmingham, second phase of Study Tour to Thailand and Nepal, to study Buddhism in the West. Organized by the Youth Desk in cooperation with the Westhill R.E. Centre in Birmingham. Participants: most of those participating in phase one;

May 17-21, 1996 AIDS Workshop in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, organized by the Youth Desk in cooperation with the Southern Africa Network on AIDS. Participants: from LWF member churches in Southern African countries.

4. ACTIVITIES IN MEMBER CHURCHES AND REGIONAL NETWORKS

Events supported financially by the LWF Youth Desk:

April 16-20, 1992 Easter Conference for Students in Tandala, Tanzania;

April 1993 Youth Leaders Training in Indonesia;
April 1993 National Youth Gathering in Malawi;
July 1-4, 1993 The Slovak Nation-Wide Youth Gathering, Slovak Republic. Participants: 890 youth from all over Slovakia;
August 1993 National Youth Assembly in Zambia;
July 1993 II Ecumenical Youth Encounter in Bolivia;
September 1993 Meeting of Latin American Network in Brazil;
November 28-December 2, 1993 Lutheran Church of Nigeria National Youth Week/Rally. Christian youth from all districts of Nigeria;
March 14-17, 1994 First meeting of the Southern Africa HIV/AIDS Network in South Africa. Participants: Southern Africa HIV/AIDS network established after HIV/AIDS Workshop in Namibia 1993;
December 20-28, 1994 Youth Exchange of young people from Lilongwe Congregation, Malawi to Ilinga Parish in Tanzania.
December 7-9, 1994 AIDS Network Meeting to prepare for AIDS Workshop planned for 1995, took place in 1996;
February 1995 Youth Gathering in Abba, Central African Republic;
1995 Youth Leadership Training Course organized by the Bangladesh Northern Evangelical Lutheran Church;
July 29-August 6, 1995 Youth Exchange program of the Federation of Evangelical Lutheran Churches in Malaysia and Singapore. Theme: "Leadership Training - Together Catch the Vision." Participants: twenty young adults from the four LWF member churches in Malaysia;
September 1-3, 1995 Photo exhibition in Geneva, Switzerland organized by youth (from poor homes or street children) of the South Bronx Photographic Center of All Saints Lutheran Parish in the Bronx, USA. Theme: "Growing in the Bronx".
1996 Contribution to AIDS Training Program of All Saints Lutheran Parish in the Bronx, USA;
April 2-9, 1996 Easter Youth Conference in Bulongwa, Tanzania. Theme: "How Wonderful We Are Created." Participants: youth from the South Central Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania.
May 10-12, 1996 International Youth Meeting in Javorník, Slovak Republic. Participants: 200 youth from the Evangelical Church A.C. in the Slovak Republic and the Silesian Evangelical Church A.C. in the Czech Republic;
June 1996 Canadian/Tanzanian Youth Exchange. Participants: ten Canadian Lutheran and Anglican youth and ten Tanzanian Lutheran and Anglican youth;
June 13-15, 1996 Youth Seminar in Batizovce, Slovak Republic. Participants: thirty youth leaders on national, regional, local levels of the Evangelical Church A.C. in the Slovak Republic;
June 13-16, 1996 National Youth Leader Training of the Kenya Evangelical Lutheran Church. Participant: twenty-five youth leaders;
July 11-14, 1996 Youth Conference of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa-Northern Diocese. Participants: young people from Lutheran churches in the Southern Africa region;

5. YOUTH INTERNSHIP

1990 Internship between churches: Mr. Ulrich Bayer from Germany went to Chile to work in a local congregation in Valdivia;
1992 Internship between churches: Ms. Aija Kaartinen from Finland spent some time in a local congregation in Italy;
September 1994-August 1995: Ms. Julia N.K. Iilonga from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia at the Lutheran Office for World Community in New York, USA;
1995 Mr. Roberto Kirchheim from Brazil in the LWF World Service Field Office in Mozambique;
1996 Rev. Abinaar Ramadie from South Africa in the LWF World Service Field Office in Uganda;
Interns in Geneva (for nine-month periods):
1991/92 Ms. Kristen Stromberg, USA
1991/92 Mr. Radoslav Danko, Slovakia
1993 Ms. Claudia Schreiber, Germany
1993 Ms. Jessisca Aliah Umbukan, Malaysia
1994 Ms. Camilla Madsen, Denmark
1994 Mr. Girts Pūle, Latvia
1994/95 Mr. Abinaar Ramadie, South Africa
1996 Ms. Sandra Corzo, Colombia
1996/97 Ms. Anna-Karin Berglund, Sweden

6. YOUTH PUBLICATIONS

YOUTH MAGAZINE (former Youth Newsletter and Youth Letter):

During this period issues nos. 28 (June 1990) to 40 have been published with themes as: World Summit for Children; Youth on War; "Do You Hear Me?"; "Western Youth in The East"; Focus on...Environment; Christian Encounter Buddhism; On Experimental Bible Studies; LWF Leadership Training Program for Younger Women; Human Rights - with focus on youth and children; Street Children;

YOUTH DIRECTORY:

The Youth Directory was published in 1992, with names and addresses of youth contact persons and chairpersons of youth organizations, as well as a description of the youth work in the churches. A new, updated, edition was planned for in 1994, however, because of lack of response from the churches it was decided not to update the Youth Directory, but only keep a list with the names of youth contacts.

HIV/AIDS RESOURCE BOOK:

Published jointly by the World Council of Churches Youth Team and the Youth Desk as a result of the HIV/AIDS Workshop in Namibia 1993, in English, Spanish and French. Also published were HIV/AIDS Brochures in English, German, French, Portuguese and Spanish.

REPORTS:

Special reports on most of the above mentioned regional/subregional consultations have been made, on others reports were made only in the Youth magazine.

7. LEADERSHIP TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT (Stewards at LWF Council Meetings)

September 10-13, 1992 Pre-Council Workshop in Madras, India. Participants: young adults from Asian countries who continued as stewards at the Council meeting, and some of the Council members representing youth;

June 16-18, 1993 Pre-Council Workshop on Youth Participation in Kristiansand, Norway. Participants: thirteen young adults from the Nordic countries who continued as stewards at the Council meeting, and some of the Council members representing youth;

June 15-17, 1995 Pre-Council Youth Workshop on Youth Empowerment for Nation Building in Windhoek, Namibia. Participants: twelve young adults from Southern African countries who continued as stewards at the Council meeting, and some of the Council members representing youth;

June 18-19, 1995 Council members representing youth met in Windhoek, Namibia, to start thinking about the preparatory process for the next Pre-Assembly Youth Conference and give some input/ideas to the new Secretary for Youth in Church and Society;

October 18-19, 1996 Pre-Council Youth Workshop on Youth and Contextualization of Worship in Geneva, Switzerland. Participants: nine young adults from European countries who continued as stewards at the Council meeting and a few of the Council members representing youth.

8. PARTICIPATION OF YOUTH IN INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES

April 1-9, 1990 an Ecumenical Youth Consultation in Limuru, Kenya, Youth Desk representative: Mr. Andrew Sebata, Zimbabwe;

April 11-18, 1990 the Vth European Ecumenical Youth Gathering in Europe in Koppelsberg, Germany. Youth Desk representatives: Ms. Kathrine Moen, Norway and Mr. Magnus Erlingsson, Iceland;

August 22-25, 1990 the National Canadian Lutheran Youth Gathering "Roots and Wings" in Vancouver, Canada, Youth Desk representatives: Ms. Katrin Stolzer and Matthias Franke, both from Eastern Germany;

September 2-4, 1990 a meeting of the World Student Christian Federation in Chantilly, France, Youth Desk representative: Ms. Isabelle Hummel, France;

June 1-8, 1992 XIVth General Assembly of SYNDESMOS (World Fellowship of Orthodox Youth) in Moscow, Youth Desk representative: Mr. Johan Ernstson;

July 10-26, 1993 Ecumenical Global Gathering of Youth and Students (EGGYS) in Mendes, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Youth Desk representatives: Martinas Banis from Lithuania, Ms. Zane Blaumane from Latvia, Ms. Janet T. Calado from the Philippines, Mr. Ilunga Kasongo N'Kulu from Zaire, Mr. Ridwin Purba from Indonesia, Mr. Pablo Quispe Uri from Bolivia, Mr. Per Roar Thorsnes from Norway and Ms. Sonja Weyermüller from Namibia;

August 29-September 3, 1993 National Conference of the Lutheran Student Movement in , Canada, Youth Desk representative: Ms. Ilse Druvina from Latvia;

October 17-24, 1993 General Meeting of the Ecumenical Youth Council in Europe in Litomysl, Czech Republic. Youth Desk participant: Ms. Agnes Pangyanszky from Hungary;

October 1993 World Student Christian Federation Regional Assembly in Höör, Sweden. Youth Desk participant: Ms. Agnes Pangyanszky from Hungary;

August-September 1994 Support for four young persons from the Czech Republic going to a youth camp in Germany;

September 1-25, 1994 Visit of young couple from Romania to Luleå Diocese of the Church of Sweden;

August 28-September 2, 1994 National Conference of the Lutheran Student Movement in Ontario, Canada, Youth Desk representative: Mr. Wong Foh Tin from the Basel Christian Church of Malaysia;

March 3-5, 1995 International Youth Consultation on Social Development in Copenhagen, Denmark. Youth Desk representatives: Ms. Christie Schellenberger from Canada, Ms. Lee-Mee Chong from the Basel Christian Church of Malaysia and Ms. Mette Geil from Denmark (all three participants in the LWF Leadership Training Program for Younger Women);

March 20-21, 1995 Congress of the "Regenboog" Foundation (which is a member of the International Christian Federation for the prevention of alcoholism and drug addiction) in Amsterdam, Netherlands. Youth Desk representative: Ms. Mary Janssen van Raay, participant in LWF Leadership Training Program for Younger Women;

July 10-16, 1995 Ecumenical Youth Council in Europe Seminar on Intolerance and Xenophobia, in Mödling, Austria. Youth Desk representative: Mr. Thomas Dasek, Youth contact in Austria;

August 27-September 1, 1995 National Conference of the Lutheran Student Movement at Camp Kuriakos (between Calgary and Edmonton), Canada, Youth Desk representative: Ms. Askah Oroo from Kenya;

August 25-30, 1996 National Conference of the Lutheran Student Movement in Guelph, Canada, Youth Desk representative: Mr. Edgar Roberto Kirchhof from Brazil.



PAYC 1990 participants demonstrating with the mothers of Plaza del Mayo, Buenos Aires, Argentina

BE NOT ASHAMED - CHRIST HAS SET US FREE

THEME PRESENTATIONS

Rev. Dr. Pradit TAKERNGRANGSARIT

Pradit Takerngrangsarit, 47, is from Thailand. He is Assistant to the President for Academic Affairs of Payap University, Chiang Mai, Thailand. Pradit's special fields of study are philosophy and religion, Christian ethics and Old Testament studies. He and his wife have two children, a girl and a boy. As for his involvement in youth work, he has worked in the Christian student movement and attended several major youth gatherings similar to the PAYC.

Rev. Dr. Wanda DEIFELT

Wanda Deifelt is a professor at Escola Superior de Teologia in São Leopoldo, Brazil. She is responsible for the chair of feminist theology, is vice-president of the seminary and dean of the ecumenical post-graduate studies institute. Wanda, 34, is married and the mother of two daughters. She belongs to the Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil.

PRESENTATION ON BUDDHISM

Ms. Dr. Chatsumarn KABILSINGH

Chatsumarn Kabilsingh is a professor at Thammasat University in Bangkok, Thailand. She was involved in the GEO-DAPRI (Global Education on Dialogue And Peace among Religions and Ideologies), an United Nations sponsored project. She has published several books and articles, among them also an article entitled "The Attitude of Buddhists towards Non-Buddhists" in Religions in Dialogue.

BIBLE STUDIES

Rev. Amy E. REUMANN

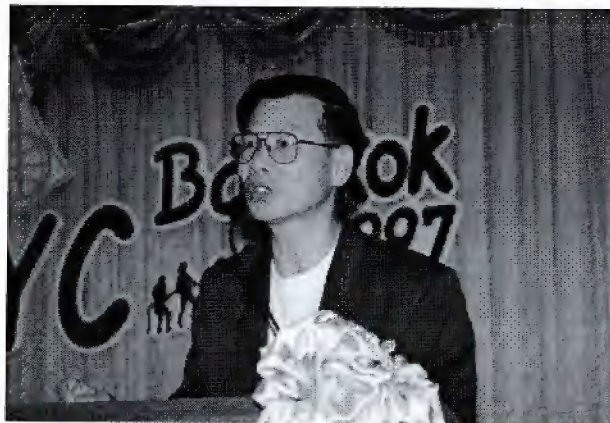
Amy Reumann, 34, is a pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. She has worked with young people, hunger, justice and multicultural issues, has led a teen-pregnancy-prevention program and is involved in local efforts to house homeless persons. Amy has also previously worked in poor, multicultural inner-city congregations, work that she found very inspiring. Fourteen years ago Amy attended the PAYC in Budapest, Hungary.

BE NOT ASHAMED, CHRIST HAS SET US FREE

Pradit TAKERNGRANGSARIT

1. A greeting from Thailand: Sawasdee

I would like to, first of all, give thanks to God for granting me this opportunity to be a part of the LWF Pre-Assembly Youth Conference in Bangkok. Thanks also to the Lutheran World Federation Department for Mission and Development, Youth in Church and Society for inviting me to participate in this historic event by contributing a short presentation in this conference on a challenging topic. I hope that some of my thoughts and concerns will be of help in your future reflections and actions. I also pray that your time together here in Bangkok among young Christians from every part of the world will help you build up a firm network for serving our Lord more enthusiastically and fruitfully. Your different cultural and politico-economic backgrounds will surely enrich and strengthen each one of you in seeking appropriate ways to respond to God's will. Your gathering together with one purpose and goal will also help you find a clear vision to sharing the Good News of our Lord Jesus Christ more effectively and meaningfully with people in your own situations and contexts.



2. Sharing the Gospel with the people of the world today

The topic given for this Pre-Assembly Youth Conference, "*Be not ashamed, Christ has set us free,*" quoted from Paul's Epistles, 2 Timothy 1:8 and Gal 5:1 is a challenging call for all of us--Christians of all ages and backgrounds--who live in today's highly competitive world. The question of how to live and witness Christ to people who strive for material success and self-satisfaction in the global economic market is a challenging one. I feel that while the people of today's world have gained new scientific and material advantages, spiritual enrichment is still most needed to fill a gap in their lives. I feel that the more material success people achieve, the more they suffer the loss of identity and the lack of spiritual fulfillment. I will not spend much time defining and debating these issues but will discuss some potential ways to witness Christ to people in this technological and consumer-oriented society. My major emphasis and concern will be mostly to reflect on the issues involved. I also will try to come up with some practical suggestions for young followers of Jesus Christ in sharing the Gospel in our complex and changing world today. A number of crucial questions and issues must be seriously discussed and taken into consideration. Such as, is the Good News of Jesus Christ still relevant to this "Information Technology and Hi-Tech Age" and the coming "Super Micro Electron Age"? What does the Gospel mean to the people of the global market today, and how do we present it? How can young people who seem to lack appropriate knowledge and experience participate in sharing the Good News with people of our global market-oriented era? What does it mean to say, "be not ashamed" with Paul in 2 Tim 1:8? What does it mean to be a person who has been set free by Christ? And how do we live a Christian life of free humanity? etc.

3. Seeking and sharing the truth in Jesus Christ

I'm always impressed and astonished by Paul at least at two significant points. First, he put his whole effort into seeking a truth of life that was real and meaningful for him. His encounter with Christ--whom he has persecuted and overlooked for some time during his long search--brought him to his knees. He accepted wholeheartedly that Jesus Christ is the Lord he was seeking. For him, Jesus Christ was the most essential element of life. Without Christ life for Paul was meaningless and empty. His experience with Christ helped him know Christ in a deeper sense, and yet he still confessed that, "*I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead*" (Philippians 3:10-11). To know Christ means more than just embrace the Christian religion. It means he must commit the whole life to his service in accordance with his will. His experience in the past taught Paul to confidently state that, "*Yet whatever*

I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss [NIV=rubbish] because of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" (Philippians 3:7-8). This conviction becomes real only if we are willing to commit our whole life and future to the service of our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul continued his search for the meaning of life with the consideration that, "Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own" (Philippians 3:12). For him, to be Christ's real followers requires a continuing commitment in a life journey of Christian faith. This consideration led Paul to bravely announce that, "It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God" (Galatians 2:20).

The example of this full commitment in seeking the truth of life as set out by Paul may be considered the first step towards witnessing Christ in all circumstances. In this sense, to know Christ does not mean just being a good Christian superficially. It means committing oneself deeply and wholeheartedly to the service and proclamation of the resurrected Christ in our actual daily living. Jesus once challenged his disciples to become his true followers by saying that, *"If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."* (Matthew 16:24). John stresses this point by saying that, *"Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor"* (John 12:26). Therefore, to be Christ's follower one must commit oneself to serve him, not for personal gain but for the fulfillment of God's reign over the world.

Second, I'm impressed by Paul's commitment to proclaim and witness Christ, whom he considered the only "essential of life," to the so-called "gentiles." For Paul, it was vital to reach out to this neglected people because of his conviction that salvation is for all. There is no such a thing as exclusiveness in the realm of the kingdom of God. The Good News of salvation brought forth by the love and grace of God in Jesus Christ is not meant to be locked up for any selected group or class of people. It is for all equally no matter of who they are and where they belong. James admits that, *"But if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors"* (James 2:9). Paul confirms this idea by saying that, *"For God shows no partiality."* In this light, the Good News of salvation and hope in Jesus Christ is the merciful grace of God for all. It must be proclaimed and shared faithfully with all inclusively. This concept must be seriously put into practice with no excuse and exception by those who embrace Christ as their Savior and Lord.

In this sense, we are to be confident and faithful in sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ in all of its aspects and with sincerity and love without shame. If we are ashamed of witnessing Christ to others, that shame suggests our lack of confidence and lack of appreciation and gratitude to Christ for the life given to us. To proclaim the Good News of the resurrected Christ requires "knowing" and "experiencing" the word and deed of Christ within us. Those who have such knowledge and experience won't be ashamed of living a Christian life as decisive peacemakers amid the divisions and confusion of society today. We won't be able to witness Christ to people who seek a better life in today's world of advanced technology unless we have found a meaningful life in Christ Jesus ourselves.

Paul's living example in seeking and sharing the truth in Jesus Christ may help us to reflect upon ourselves as Christ's true followers. What makes us feel ashamed in proclaiming his Good News, then, lies basically on what we believe. Our conviction of what Christ has done for us requires more than being good and pious Christians. It requires active participation in suffering with people and in proclaiming the hope and love of God through our daily living with them. Therefore, our goal in life and our work in daily living depend on what we believe. As James puts it, *"So faith by itself, it has no works, is dead"* (James 2:17). In this sense, to believe in and to follow after Jesus Christ means more than just being good Christians. It means witnessing Christ through our actual works and full participation with people in day-to-day living. Paul supports this concept by saying that, *"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything; the only thing that counts is faith working through love"* (Galatians 5:6).

The above statement implies that if we are confident in what we believe and feel gratitude for the life given in Jesus Christ, we cannot just keep ourselves hidden behind closed doors. We must eagerly stand at the forefront of sharing Good News in action. The meaningful and valuable life granted to us empowers us to be Christ's messengers in the world. We are not ashamed to speak and act prophetically because we have learned and experienced a worthwhile life in Christ in our close relationship with him. This truth in Christ gives us freedom to witness to his love and care for every generation. It also reminds us of the authority bestowed on us by his Holy Spirit to proclaim the Good News of true love to the world in all situations and circumstances. Life in Christ gives us new wisdom and insights to see new visions and new strength to witness his love to a broken world. As free humanity we are Christ's instruments to proclaim his Good News of salvation to people with pure love and care for every group of people, especially the oppressed and the marginalized in our society. As Jesus once reminded his disciples, *"Just as the Son*

of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28). Paul confirms that this attitude of sharing and serving for others in Christ's name is one of acting as a new humanity with new identity. He said that, "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17). So, there is no room to be ashamed for living and sharing life with those who are seeking for the fullness of life.

4. Christ has set us free

According to Paul, we are a new creation only if we are in Christ and Christ is in us. I am sure most of us have been told and taught since our Sunday School days the doctrine which states that Christ died in order to deliver us from the bondage of sin. We are not slaves of sin anymore but now live as a free humanity to God, free to serve him. Paul put it clearly when he said, *"But thanks be to God that you, having once been slaves of sin, have become obedient from the heart to the form of teaching to which you were entrusted, and that you, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness" (Romans 6:17-18). Paul also ensures us that, "But now you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the advantage you get is sanctification. The end is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:22-23)*

Yet, being set free does not mean just that. It requires a further step, namely we must live as God's slaves in the midst of today's real world. To witness to the love and grace of God in Jesus Christ is one critical step. But to put our faith into effective action in the church and society is even more vital. The question of how to live a Christian life in such a materialistic and demanding world today must be taken into serious consideration. If we aren't aware of the questions and issues facing us today, we can find ourselves enslaved to those very issues. We may end up being prevented from living as ones who have been set free from bondage to sin and self.

Bondage to sin, thus, here is not merely limited to the doctrinal level but also extends to include contemporary issues. To be freed from sin means more than just spiritual freedom. It implies physical and material freedom as well. I think that the most powerful sin today among people of all ages is materialism and consumerism. This may be a root cause of all the problems human beings are facing today. Several obvious instances include the widening gap between the rich and the poor, the haves and the have-nots, all forms of oppression due to the divisive competition for survival by the use of any means, material gain, war, starvation and poverty, broken homes and families, drug addiction, modern uncured disease such as HIV/AIDS, ethical issues such as human cloning, gender issues, and many more. Our depressed and divided society today needs serious attention and real transformation.

These problems can't be solved easily. The ills we're experiencing can't be cured by just advanced science and technology. The only true hope we have is the healing power of God working through us. We must work for justice and peace in the world because we have been set free from the traps of an unjust system and consumer society. We need to vocally and actually proclaim the Gospel of freedom in Jesus Christ to all people, especially, to those who exercise power and dominate the global market system. If we have been set free from sin and from the bondage of being enslaved to materialism, we are able to witness to the love of God in Jesus Christ with love and joy. This will give hope and salvation a chance in our severely ill world. Let also love and justice prevail in our society through us all.

5. Christ is the foundation of life

The issues and questions raised above cannot be answered until we know who we are and what we believe. The short and encouraging statement by Paul, **"Be not ashamed,"** from 2 Timothy 1:8 may be regarded as part of the process of **"being set free by Christ,"** and yet it is an important step to begin with. Paul makes it clear by saying in Galatians 5:1 that, *"For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery."* In other words, because we have been set free from all forms of bondage by the loving power of Christ, we have to be firm in this new position as free humanity. And as a result of that, we are not ashamed to demonstrate the quality of freedom to others. We have a new identity of being free humanity, and therefore we are commissioned to be Christ's living testimony to his ultimate goal of freeing humankind from the bondage to sin of all kinds. We have been given a vital role with a significant mission and responsibility for sharing the Good News of freedom and hope to the world. This is a covenantal assignment and commission bestowed on us. Jesus Christ ensured his disciples that, *"You have not chosen me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name" (John 15:16)*

The question is whether or not are we really free from all forms of bondage into the freedom of Christ. One may also doubt whether he or she is able to demonstrate the quality of life Christ expects from us. To be sure, one has

to believe that she or he is God's own person purposely created according to God's divine plan. The account of creation presented in Genesis confirms that humankind is the central point of God's creation project. Among everything created, humanity is the highlight and most valuable creature of all. The act of the creation of humanity presented in Genesis 1:26-27 and 2:7 reflects God's utmost purpose in that creative act. The forming of humanity out of dust or clay reminds us of God's intensely close relationship with us. It also reminds us of the lowly position from which humanity has emerged. It is the Spirit of God which is the breath of life breathed into us that causes us to become living beings. In this regard, each person becomes a living being not because of one's ability but by living in God alone. As a matter of fact, human life depends solely on God's merciful purpose and plan. We are worthy only because we are created by God and because God's divine life is within us. Therefore, to be alive in itself is meaningless and worthless without God. This is best captured by the Book of Psalms which says, *"What are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor"* (Psalm 8:4-5). Again, the Psalter rhetorically asked, *"O Lord, what are human beings, that you regard them, or mortals that you think of them? They are like a breath; their days are like a passing shadow"* (Psalm 144:3-4). This reminds us of our total dependency on God who is merciful and acts of love. Therefore, we are called to respond to his commission to proclaim his Good News with trust and obedience. The Apostles' Creed's affirmation that, **"I believe in God, the Father Almighty who created the heavens and the earth"** becomes real and true for us because we haven't accidentally emerged from nowhere but are purposely and intentionally created by God Almighty in God's living image. This also confirms our firm foundation as God's own people and that we are free to live and to act under God's guiding direction.

6. Witnessing Christ in the world of the free-market economy

We cannot ignore the fact that we are now living in a modern and free world that is shaped by the progress of "globalization" and the products of advanced technology. There is no doubt that we benefit directly and indirectly from the global market network and from the advantages of a highly developed technology including especially the "information super highway." This information technology in one way or another gives us more freedom to choose and leads us to actively participate in unlimited material consumption. We have been given increased freedom to access and transmit information across national boundaries. We are free to gain higher and broader education and, most importantly, to set our own goals and directions. To this end, it seems that globalization comes with many good consequences in allowing people of every race from almost every corner of the world with different backgrounds in culture, politics, economics, and beliefs to come into closer contact with each other. Whether we like it or not our modern world has become more and more a "global village" with its own strengths. One positive result globalization brings is that nations are easing economic, legal and political controls over the economy in order to allow the flow of goods and services in the global market. It also encourages active cooperation among people of all races at all levels, especially transnational cooperation and all levels of transnational joint ventures and projects.

At the outset, this bright light of global cooperation provides great advantages to the meeting of human needs, especially in the sharing of intellectual resources, such as those of information technology and advanced scientific findings. But there are the negative results which are hidden within globalization as well, ones that raise various issues. These include, in particular, the violation of human rights and dignity in all forms. We have been aware of the fact that the "global village" brings suffering and cultural deterioration to family members of all ages. An influx of all kind of information stirs our materialistic desires for consumption that, in turn, result in life crises. A desire to gain power over material consumption is one way of reducing human dignity. Materialism and consumerism lead to problems such as that of Third World tourism which causes child labor, prostitution, and the spread of HIV Aids. It also threatens local cultural richness, creates energy and environmental crises, causes over-consumption, drug addiction, and wide-spread technological "imitating" by which young people wish to imitate celebrities and to obtain hi-tech toys, such as Japanese "Tamagotji" which is another form of hi-tech addiction, and so on. It seems that the world of the future is moving toward two types of nations, namely, superpowers and powerless nations. The gap between the haves and the have-nots will inevitably grow wider. The rich and developed nations will control the poor and underdeveloped nations. All of this presents the world with ethical issues concerning human rights and dignity.

The issues and questions raised above require serious reflection and response. It appears that the world that was created by God in the beginning now corrupts and twists God's ultimate purpose in creation. Is it true that the world of Genesis 1:31, in which *"God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good,"* now has something wrong with it? Has God's creation project completely failed? Is it true that our modern world is not "very good" any more? Along these lines, the word of God as given by the prophet Isaiah may cast even more doubt upon the condition of our world. Isaiah wrote, *"For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things*

shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating; for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight" (Isaiah 65:17-18).

I don't think Isaiah's announcement questions the success of God's creation project. It is rather a confirmation of God's ongoing act of creation and that this is a "very good" world for us. We can live in it and witness to God's ongoing acts of creation. Whether we like it or not God's creation activities are at work in each one of us at all times and places. All that matters is that we must be willing to respond to his call and be ready to witness to his new creation with truth and freedom.

The good and bad byproducts that "globalization" brings with it are things we have to live with. It is important that we aren't overwhelmed by the influx of modernization, but rather rule over it with a reasonable, God-given wisdom. We have to remember that the world is changing but God is unchangeable. The advantages people gain from computerization and modernization tend to move them away from God as the foundation of life. The issue is how to use this modern information technology and the close connections of the "global village" as effective instrument to draw people closer to God. The world is changing and deteriorating but our trust and belief in God must become new and more powerful each day. The activity of the new creation of God must be stronger than the powers of this science and technological world. The Gospel message to the world remains the same but its approach must be adjusted to the real needs of the children of God. If the Good News of freedom in Christ responds to people in their search for real meaning, then it will confirm the relevance of the Gospel message to the people of all generations and times.

As we are entering the 21st century, there are things that need our close attention. What does it mean to be disciples of Christ in today's changing society? What challenges face us as young Christians to witness the living Christ to people who are seeking self-satisfaction and contentment? Is there a "new world order" to be brought forth by young people of this generation? Do we stand firmly enough in our faith in Christ in today's competitive and advantage-taking world? How are we going to respond to issues such as those of injustice, gender issues, human rights violation, and so on? Are we ready to move confidently into the new century that will be upon us in less than three years? How do we witness Jesus Christ effectively and bravely to people of the new century? How do we proclaim the Good News to the micro electron age? What do we mean by "ecumenism" and "evangelism"? How do we live as the people who have been chosen by Christ and not as ones trapped in the illusions of the modern and material world?

These are questions that need to be addressed and brought up in our discussions and reflections during this very short week that we are together here in the very warm, humid urban surrounding of Bangkok. With biblical reflection, prayers, love and concern, mutual understanding, and close fellowship with Christ, we will see visions of how to live as Christ's true followers in our world today and the world that is coming. In order to appreciate the freedom and liberty given to us, we must personally experience fellowship with Christ. Moreover, we need to fully participate in the life struggles of the people in our societies in order to appreciate the love of God in Jesus Christ. This will surely give us courage to live as the ones who have been set free by Christ, our Lord and Savior.

7. Conclusion

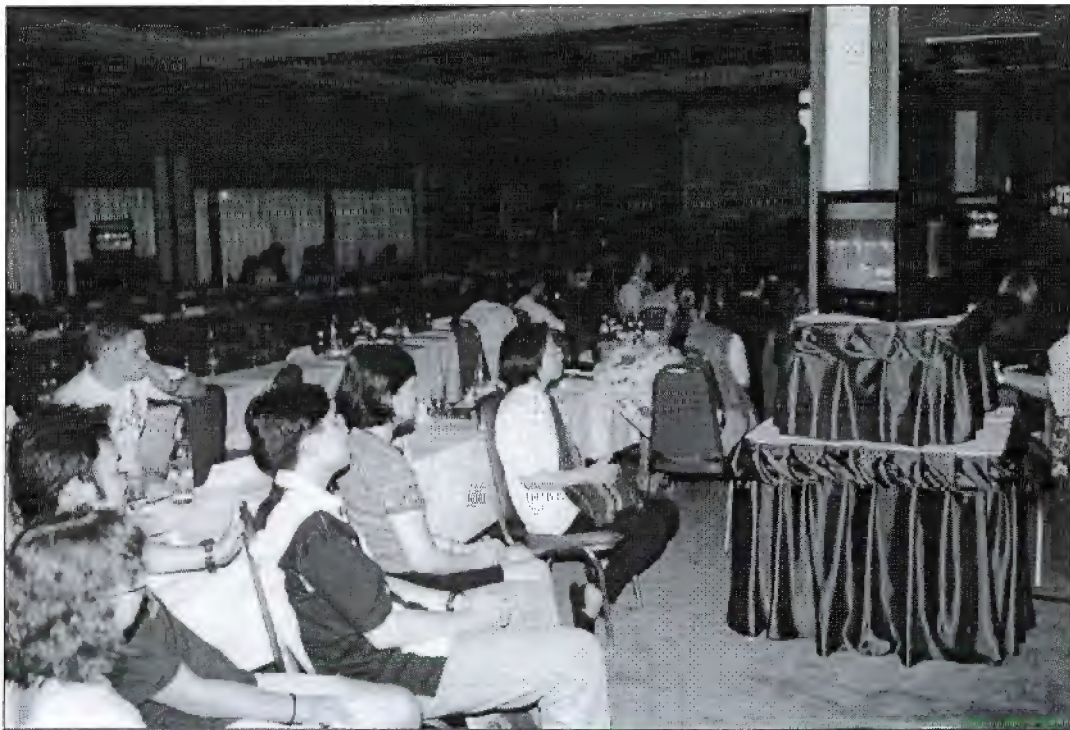
Let the word of Jesus Christ addressed to the people of his time rings in our conscience and minds at all times. Christ said, *"If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth and the truth will make you free" (John 8:31-32).* And let Paul's words in 1 Cor 8.9 remind us that we must, *"take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak."* Paul also urges that, *"Brothers and sisters, do not be children in your thinking; rather, be infants in evil, but in thinking be adults" (1 Corinthians 14:20)* Finally, let us have courage to witness to Christ as ones who have been set free by taking Paul's encouraging word given to the young Timothy that, *"Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity" (1 Timothy 4:12).*

I personally believe that young people of all races, who consider and identify themselves as Christians have great freedom and potentiality to witness to the love of God for a better new world order. This can be achieved only if we are not ashamed of being Christ's true followers and disciples. The confidence we thus gain will give us power and freedom to be the light and hope of the world to the end that the coming century will be a better place in which to live and share. To live in Christ is to be freed from the temptations of the world and not be trapped by the corrupt systems of economic power. I also am confident that if we young people from every corner of the world come together in a firmly knit network, we will be able to shape the future into the direction designed by and pleasing to God our Creator and Savior. I believe that with the power of the young generation like us all enables us to proclaim

the Good News of freedom in Christ to all generations. We, ourselves, must be free from all the temptations of the rampaging stream of consumerism and materialism.

Let the call, *"be not ashamed, Christ has set you free,"* encourage us to serve the Lord fully. Again, let the question raised by the Psalmist, *"How can young people keep their purity?"* in Psalm 119:9 lead us to the same answer, *"By guarding it according to your word. With my whole heart I seek you; do not let me stray from your commandments. I treasure your word in my heart, so that I may not sin against you"* (Psalm 119:9-11). Therefore, the word of God and fellowship with Christ among all peoples is one of our strengths to live as the free humanity.

May the merciful love of God who has set us free be our light and vision as we strive to witness and proclaim his Good News with courage and hope. May our time together be worthwhile and meaningful to us all as we seek to serve the Lord with our young and pure energy as young people of Christ. Let Christ who has set us free be praised and glorified in the highest.



Participants watching the handover of Hong Kong to China June 30/July 1, 1997

BE NOT ASHAMED -- CHRIST HAS SET US FREE

Wanda DEIFELT



The title of this conference may sound redundant to conservative people in the churches, with whom you probably have had contact. They would probably say: "There is too much freedom already. Youth nowadays grow up not believing in anything. The moral standards are at their lowest. They are not ashamed of anything..." For them, a conference with the theme "Be Not Ashamed -- Christ Has Set Us Free" would probably sound like an open statement to permissiveness, where there is freedom for everything, with no need to be ashamed. That is certainly not the line of argument that I will use. In this presentation, I want to affirm the freedom that comes through Christ, that calls human beings to live

out their faith with responsibility and to witness the good news to all people around the world, without being ashamed.

What to witness in a time like this?

I would like to ask each one of you: what is the main concern of youth today? If you were to identify one burning issue (among the many you could probably name) for your generation today, what would you choose? I will ask you to talk to the person next to you for a couple of minutes so that you may be capable of identifying such issues among each other, and then we may spell them out loud in the plenary.

Among the issues that are likely to come out are: unemployment or lack of possibilities of finding decent jobs in modern societies, and as its counterpart the fact that young people work almost as slave labor in many countries around the world; violence in the urban settings with the growth of incidents involving youth; the lack of perspective and hope, inducing many young people into committing suicide, abuse of alcohol and drugs; the general lack of interest in social issues, church issues, and solidarity among people; the growth in regional armed conflicts, caused by religious, ethnic and cultural differences, etc. This scenario is the setting into which we are called to witness. What can we, as Christians, say to this world that we are part of and how can we address the issues that concern us today?

We approach a new millennium with great expectations, but also with a clear sense of the crisis felt in every corner of the planet. The new millennium is perceived as the start of a new era, a new beginning, a completely new world and life situation, with big changes all over the world. Some people may say that the new millennium already started with the fall of the wall that separated Eastern and Western Europe. Others may say that the day apartheid ceased in South Africa was such a decisive date. Still others will say that the end of the millennium happened with the end of the Reagan government. I would not include in this list the fact that Brazil won the last Soccer cup as a sign of the new millennium, although some Brazilian soccer fanatics might even say that winning a championship is a sign of a new era. The old is left behind and we search for the new. In the context of modern, secularized, high technology and impersonal societies, religion and faith apparently seem to belong to the old millennium.

At the end of the 20th century, the scientific mode of thought left an empty space. In the post-Enlightenment era, reason, the search for knowledge and truth ruled, and religious faith was seen as credulity, if not blatantly as superstition. René Descartes (1596-1650) with his "*I think therefore I am*" is, perhaps, the best symbol of this philosophical movement, characterized by the rationalism that influenced the Western mind set. With its spirit of skepticism and empiricism in social and political thought, Enlightenment also challenged religion: how can faith be proved scientifically? What cannot be proved empirically and scientifically cannot be considered truth. Enlightened persons were those free from ignorance, prejudice or superstition. With the Enlightenment, we also witness a shift in power. Christianity lost its post as controller of the Western minds. It was no longer the church that dictated what could or could not be believed, but reason. The positive effect is, of course, the fact that the church could no

longer justify atrocious acts such as the Inquisition, the condemnation of scientists who presented their theories or the burning of people with opinions different from those stated by the church. But, as a drawback, the emphasis on rationalism left an empty space with which Christians still try to come to terms: how can we speak of faith in a secularized society?

In the postmodern society and culture that we live in, we are also witnessing the rapid growth of new religious movements everywhere. It is a sharp contrast with rationalism. In a recent poll done in my country, 98% of the people interviewed said they believe in God. Why do people continue to have faith in God? Because faith and reason are not mutually exclusive elements. Because faith is not a human creation, but a gift of God. Because our times have a desire to hear the Word of God. We need to use reason to analyze our context, the reality in which we live. Reason gives us the tools to evaluate the causes and the effects of our situation critically. That is why, more than ever, people of faith are dialoguing with all disciplines, in all fields of knowledge. Thus we come up with facts. But facts alone do not move people into action, into prophetically denouncing injustice and announcing a just, free and egalitarian society. This comes through faith. It is through faith that we find strength to keep going. In Jesus Christ we find references for our ethics, for the values we apply every day in our lives. The freedom and justice that we receive through Christ impel us into acts of justice.

It is a fact, for instance, that in Brazil alone four and a half million children have their future compromised because they have to work during childhood. Roniel, 11 years old, is on top of a truck at 4 o'clock in the morning, heading to a sugar-cane plantation where he earns less than 20 US dollars a week, cutting a ton of sugar-cane every day. Ginomar Reis, 15 years old, works in a coal mine. He receives 5 US dollars per week. At age 15, his lungs are already damaged because of the bad quality of air that he breathes. Katiana de Paula, 11 years old and ten siblings, sells flowers throughout the night at restaurants in São Paulo. She sleeps during the morning and attends classes in the afternoon. Most of the time she falls asleep during classes (Source: Revista Istoé, 1439, April 30, 1997).

In situations of extreme poverty and dehumanization, people turn to the churches, looking for hope and affirmation of their human dignity. The increase of new churches can be seen all over, but the answers they give are not always appropriate. Among the new religious movements one, led by Bishop Edir Macedo, grows at fantastic rates both in Brazil and overseas. Everyday a new temple is inaugurated. The success of this church called The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus) is due to its message. Its followers preach immediate access to God, immediate rewards for followers of their religion and immediate success. They preach a theology of prosperity. Their leaders have recently been involved in many scandals, as they seem to benefit the most from this type of theology, becoming richer and richer at the expense of the churchgoers. For them, religion is not a personal relationship with God, through Jesus Christ the liberator, that is lived out in community. Rather, it is a personal deal made with God. A prayer to God is almost like a business transaction: if I give something to God, God has to give something back to me. If I act according to God's expectation, God has to act according to mine. That is why prosperity is only a matter of time for such churchgoers. Followers come, in their majority, from the poorer sectors of society. The increase in members in these new churches testifies to the fact that, at least in Brazil, rationality and secularization are not the main problem. The problem is that traditional churches are not capable of giving an adequate answer to the people in their material and spiritual needs.

Among us, poverty grows faster than ever, although government officials claim the opposite. According to the United Nations, in Latin America and the Caribbean 24% of the population (110 million people) live on less than 1 US dollar per day (Source: O Estado de São Paulo, June 12, 1997). It is understandable that in a context of extreme poverty and misery easy answers of immediate relief are welcome. One would expect, then, that churches would always be full. That is not the case, at least among Lutherans. Having worked as a pastor in a small congregation in the south of Brazil, I noticed that whenever people disappeared from the church they were going through financial difficulties. Unemployment or other social problems kept people away from participating in the church, when it should be exactly the opposite. But people were embarrassed, even ashamed, of coming to church when they no longer had a car because they had to sell it to pay their bills, when they had only old-fashioned clothes to wear, or could not contribute financially to the church.

One of the greatest findings of Luther's theology is justification by grace through faith. Through it Luther discovered that all expectations -- personal, social and ecclesiastical -- cannot prevent human beings from relating to God. More than ever, our society preaches that everyone deserves what they get: what we sow, we also reap;

those who work shall receive accordingly. We witness it everyday: we are justified and accepted according to our possessions, our works and deeds. There is a tremendous need for Martin Luther in our times, to reaffirm that, even if human beings fall short, God reaches out to meet us, for *"the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith"* (Romans 1:17). God's standards are not those of this world. The good news of acceptance and forgiveness, that Martin Luther found so liberating, needs to be rediscovered in many Lutheran congregations so that everybody may feel reconciled, welcome, comfortable, at home, when entering a church.

Knowing that there is a need for our witness, we should not be ashamed to do so. But what do we want to witness? What is it that we are not ashamed to proclaim in the market place, in the streets, throughout the whole world? We want to proclaim that there is no more bondage. Jesus Christ has freed us, and in freedom we will proclaim the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. However, we do not want to preach a cheap grace, one which makes God a puppet or a genie to perform our wishes. We also search for criteria to establish a sound theology. With Luther, we identify his theology of the cross hand in hand with his discovery of justification through faith by grace. Also for us a clue is given in the second part of the verse chosen for the topic of this conference (cf. 2 Timothy 1:8): "share in suffering for the power of God." God is there where people are suffering and in need. Jesus Christ has the face of the child dying of leukemia, the young woman dying of Aids, the disabled man begging for food in the streets. These people are no longer a figure in statistics, but are an invitation to Christian solidarity. Jesus Christ is there to affirm human dignity to those who are socially outcast, saying that they belong to the community: they are the lost sheep whom the good shepherd searched for.

God is there where people need God; and is needed most when and where there is suffering. It is in the suffering hours, in utter despair, when there is nobody else to turn to, that we may turn to God and say "help me, I cannot do this on my own, be with me." Most people associate the power of God with tremendous doings, miracles and all types of successful achievements. God may be there. But for sure God is there where people suffer. Not that suffering is the will of God. On the contrary, the will of God is life in abundance. God never abandons us even if we may abandon God. In the Bible, God is compared to a mother who will always remember her children: *"As one whom his mother comforts, I will comfort you (Isaiah 66:13)."* We want to witness God's love for humanity. And, if God loved us so much, shouldn't we, as God's children, do the same?

False understanding of freedom (when there is no responsibility)

Recently, in Brazil, a group of youth was caught by the police and imprisoned. Five teenagers, one of them less than 18 years old, were roaming the streets of Brasilia, the capital of the country, in a fancy car. They saw somebody asleep at a bus station, and thought he was an indigent, a beggar. To make fun of him, they decided to set him on fire. They already had a bottle with flammable fuel in the car with them (the accusation in the process tries to show they already had the intention to commit the act because they had the fuel with them in the car, not in the trunk). They set the person on fire and watched him burn. When witnesses tried to rescue the man and bring him to the hospital, they fled. They went home, changed the car and pretended nothing had ever happened. The man died hours later, of complications due to third- degree burns covering 95% of his body.

The victim was an indigenous man, Galdino Jesus dos Santos, 45 years old, from the Pataxó tribe. These were the first Indians to have contact with the white Portuguese, 500 years ago. He had gone to Brasilia to meet with government representatives to solve their land rights. 500 years after the first encounter with white civilization, the indigenous people have only diseases, malnutrition, and much less land than they used to have to account for. Galdino had traveled by bus and arrived in Brasilia too late in the evening. He had no place to stay, so he fell asleep at a bus station, waiting for the early morning hours to meet with the Commission of Indigenous Affairs of the Brazilian government.

This incident caused great shock. Not because somebody was killed in the streets. Those of you who come from large cities in the Third World know that violence is a daily experience. Several other incidents were reported in the last months of homeless people being set on fire while they were sleeping in the streets. In this case, it caused an upheaval, first of all, because an indigenous person was involved. The incident happened on April 19, a day when we celebrate "Dia do Índio" (Indigenous people's day). And, secondly, because the five teenagers belong to upper-class, highly educated and well-known families of Brasilia. Some of them are sons of federal judges, government officials and high-ranking chiefs of police. "We didn't know it was an Indian. We only wanted to scare a beggar," said one of the young men involved the day after the death of Galdino. As if killing a homeless person were acceptable, but not an indigenous person.

The death of Galdino Jesus dos Santos set up the discussion on what are the values that guide upper-class youth today. Júlio Lancelotti, a Roman Catholic priest who works with homeless people in São Paulo affirmed: "This act reveals an utter dislike of poor people. It shows that a group of the social elite has difficulties to accept and live with the socially outcast" (Source: Istoé, 1439-30/04/97, p. 23). They repeat the same values they receive from home and see implemented everyday in society. Poor people are like flies. They swear at you when you stop the car at the street lights or at the shopping mall. Their children are always begging. They are a nuisance that needs to be eliminated. That is what the youth hear and see. The government does not hear the cries of the landless and homeless people, why should they?

This is a truly globalized type of youth, that surfs on Internet, spends its vacation at Disney World, and goes to Europe for education. Everything local and contextual stinks! The best we can do with it is burn it down. No wonder the group thought it was acceptable to scare a beggar, a homeless person, setting him on fire. They were surprised to find out that the man was from an indigenous group. The defense in the process tried to argue insanity, saying the youth suffered from some type of mental disturbance. A renowned psychologist argued, however, that the five teenagers are, in reality, a mirror of the Brazilian society as a whole. They merely played out what most adults would hypocritically conceal.

Some of you might be wondering what this story has to do with you. Nobody invited to a Pre- Assembly Youth Conference would engage in such atrocious acts, defend such absurd ideas or even relate to people with this type of mentality. That is true. However, I want to point out two things. First of all, the ideas behind the act of the five youth in Brasilia are more common than you think. You will be able to locate them in your own contexts, as I have pointed out in mine. It represents the great challenge for youth work in our days and in our society. How can youth work with other youth, talk the same language, share the same dreams and work toward similar goals? I would be so daring as to say that working with youth nowadays is no longer a matter of mission or assuring the continuity of the Christian church on to the next generations. I say it is a question of survival of all human beings. The attitude of the youth shows our society naked, giving us a chance to contemplate our beauty, but we also have to face our scars.

Recently, a similar incident was reported in connection with another group of youth setting a homeless person on fire. When confronted, the group said they never had the intention to harm anybody. They were just "looking for new emotions." This search for new emotions is the same argument used by many others who abuse alcohol, use drugs and exercise their sexuality without paying attention to contraception. By bringing up these examples I do not agree with that conservative church member's observation, whom I mentioned earlier in my presentation, that youth live in permissiveness. If I refer to the reality of drugs, chemical dependence and abuse of one's own body, as experiences shared by youth all over the world, I see it as a challenge for the whole of the church, and not just as a task of a small interest group. Secondly, because this reality reflects the situation of our society, which has its values upside-down, it is not possible simply to blame youth. Rather, all of the church and society need to take responsibility. Third, these examples have to do with freedom and the way we make use of it, which is the subject of this presentation.

Nowadays we see freedom without limits. A generation of parents trying their best to break away from a confining type of education full of rules and prohibitions have fallen into the trap of setting no rules at all. Having experienced a type of education that is extremely restrictive and authoritarian, where children and youth have no freedom at all, contemporary parents are trying to compensate by giving to their children "everything they did not have when they were kids." Another psychologist says that many parents try to compensate for their absence from home most hours of the day and for leaving children at home or under the responsibility of other people. They do not want to come home and spend the few hours they have with their children setting up rules and norms, creating conflicts when rules and norms are not followed. Modern households are most commonly characterized by much technology, but little dialogue. There is a generalized lack of time.

Is it possible to coordinate freedom and responsibility, or are they mutually exclusive? Paul, in the first century, was already faced with a very similar issue. What to do with the law, with rules, if we live under grace? Does that mean that no rule and law are necessary anymore? The disputes arising in the first century regarding Christian freedom are very real. Some said that since Jesus Christ had already died and risen, the law would no longer be necessary. Christ set us free. Paul, however, said that Jesus Christ had come to fulfill the law. Through him, the law would no longer be a bondage, as it had been, with human beings trying to justify themselves through their own

deeds and means. The common understanding was that everybody could try to follow the law and thus attain perfection. However, nobody could really follow the law 100%.

As Christians, we are no longer under the bondage of the law. However, this does not mean that we can do simply as we please. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 10:23 says: *"All things are lawful, but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful, but not all things build up."* Therefore, the criterion is not simply to follow the law or not, to refrain from doing something because it is forbidden. As human beings, we have the capacity to make ethical decisions and use our discernment. There is a very common sentence, known worldwide, that states that "my liberty ends where the other person's liberty begins." This is a liberal understanding of freedom. For Christians, an additional element is added: the concern and assurance of freedom not only for me, but for the other person. A clue is given in continuity with Paul's argument: *"Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor."* (1 Corinthians 10:24). What Christians seek is to exercise freedom through the works of love and justice.

The fruits of freedom: works of justice

On March 8, 1996, in Strasbourg (France) the Albert Schweitzer award was given to the Youth Movement for a United World, from the Netherlands, on behalf of their dedication to foreigners and those seeking support after being exiled from their countries. The chairperson, conferring the award, made the following remark: "You have taken upon yourselves the suffering of those who have lost their roots, those who seek political asylum, those outcast from their original environment." One of the youth responded in thanks: "What unites us, young people from different cultures and religions, is the ideal of a united world. We want to respond to consumerism with a 'culture of giving', to selfishness with an openness to other people. Instead of discrimination, we affirm the great richness of cultural diversity."

There is no law that forces young people from the Netherlands nor from any other country in the world to testify for peace and work for justice. This is done out of freedom. We need to point out and give credit to the efforts done by people of good will who give from their time and resources to witness to others. I am reminded, for instance, of the countless number of young volunteers who help as street educators in Latin America. This is an important work, specially with the increase of sexually transmitted diseases and HIV contamination. During this year's Carnival, for instance, many young men and women could be seen distributing leaflets and other materials to party-goers, explaining about the dangers of AIDS and how it could be prevented. They were not paid by any agency and were even depriving themselves from fully enjoying the national festival. But they did that out of a clear sense of commitment to a cause, an ideal, and an awareness that their contribution could make a difference.

Freedom has an ethical imperative, which is justice. The awareness of one's capacities and knowledge of one's capabilities gives assurance that everyone can make a difference. All of us, as an essential part of the body of Christ, not only play an important role in the body. Each of us is an essential part for the witness of the Christian message. *"There are varieties of gifts, but there is one Spirit. There are varieties of service, but the same Lord. There are varieties of working, but it is the same God that inspires them all"* (1 Corinthians 12: 4-6). The image Paul uses is the body: the body does not consist of one member, but of many, and all members of the body are necessary for the well-being of the body. There is no room for hierarchy nor discrimination, since all parts of the body are equally important and necessary. The body of Christ is and extends itself over the whole world.

Our faith in God has to be lived out in concrete acts. This is not to be understood as a new attempt to justify ourselves by our works. As I pointed out beforehand, Lutherans need to rediscover and reclaim justification by faith, for we are *"not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ"* (Galatians 2:16). But, ever since Luther preached and taught the doctrine of justification by faith, his opponents concluded that he defended the abolition of works. In 1520, Luther wrote a treatise entitled *Von den guten Wercken* (A Treatise on Good Works), in which he defined that good works come, first of all, from God. Human beings can never perform good works alone because the attribute "good" can only refer to God. "Good" is the work that God operates for us and within us, giving us faith as a gift. However, human beings are called to live out their faith by performing "righteous, authentic, really good and credible" work. Luther develops his ethics based on the analysis of the Ten Commandments, starting with the first, where he affirms the need to trust and hope only in God.

We are free to serve and witness to the life of Jesus Christ, his death and resurrection. We are invited to share the good news that Jesus Christ lived in solidarity with the outcast and suffering, invited women and men to be his disciples and continues to invite us today to be his followers. We witness that he died on the cross in accordance

with his life and as a consequence of his option for a new kingdom, where none is excluded and where happiness and life will abound. We remind each other that Jesus Christ died because of the sins of humanity, and other sacrifices are no longer necessary. As Christians, we follow Jesus Christ in witnessing to new values to our society, sharing our commitment to the cause of the reign of God and looking for signs of this reign already present in our midst.

However, it does not depend exclusively on us. It is like the story of that rooster who got up very early to wake up the sun with his song. When the day had not yet started, the rooster would proudly stand up on the highest point of the barn roof to wake up the sun. He was really proud and was always bragging about his important job. One day, the rooster overslept and was surprised to find out that the sun was already shining bright, in spite of the fact that it had not been woken up by the rooster. The works and deeds that we perform are important, but we should be humble enough to recognize that we do not perform them on our own. With Luther we can say "and if somebody believes that they have already reached it, they don't know that they are just beginning. We are always on our way. We need to leave behind what we already know and have and search for what we do not know and have yet."

In 1 Timothy we read "*Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity (1 Timothy 4:18)*". Youth are setting many and great examples of witness. What characterizes this work is creativity, compassion and a deep sense of communion. I wish to end my presentation in a tone of celebration for all the good work being done by young people, committed to the cause of Jesus Christ, around the globe. Each of you is a witness to that. We have a full agenda in front of us. But we should not dismiss all that which has already been accomplished. Finally, we should never forget to celebrate each and everyone of you as true gifts of God to the church.

HAVING A GLIMPSE OF BUDDHISM

Chatsumarn KABILSINGH

In order to get you acquainted with some ideas about Buddhism and to prepare the ground for a more fruitful dialogue, I am posing some questions which often have been asked by non-Buddhists. I will also try to provide answers as guidelines for a better understanding of Buddhism without sounding too academic.

I hope this will create some awareness for you to compare Buddhism with your own beliefs and practices. This process will help to deepen your understanding of your own faith and at the same time broaden your outlook towards non-Christian beliefs and practices.



What does it mean to be a Buddhist?

For a person to become a Buddhist, one undergoes a very simple ritual of taking refuge in the Triple Gem, that is the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. What does it mean to take refuge in the Buddha? There are many levels to understand the Buddha. The historical Buddha cannot possibly be one's refuge as he himself passed away with the passing of time. It is not that Indian prince once living in India that we could take refuge in. We believe that he was enlightened, it's the enlightenment that is important to us. An even more important message is the belief that the enlightenment that he experienced could be true for us also. And unless we take it into our own heart and into our practice, only then that enlightenment, that Buddhahood can be a real refuge for us.

As a Christian, when you take wine and bread symbolizing the blood and flesh that Jesus Christ sacrificed for you, that sacrament could save you only when you seriously take him into your heart, into your life. He remains the guiding light for all your activities. You could understand taking refuge in the Buddha in a similar manner. Dharma, the teaching and Sangha the community of monks and nuns following the path the Buddha had shown us becomes meaningful in the same way.

We also believe in the law of karma. That is, we believe that every action with intention will bear fruit. If you plant mango you will soon be getting mangoes. What you sow, so you reap. This belief evens out the pain of inequality that we find in life. A rich but corrupt person will finally receive the result of his corruption. Also because of this belief we find lots of tolerance in our society, the natural law will take care of itself without our intervention. As a Christian you can fool everyone else but God.

2. Is Buddhism pessimistic?

Some people tend to brand Buddhism as pessimistic because of its recognition of the suffering of the world. The quest which drove the young prince Siddhartha away from his palace in search of Truth was "How can we overcome human suffering, namely old age, sickness and death?" The Buddha started his teaching by simply recognizing this as human suffering but he did not stop there. He explained its cause and led us to the path that takes us out of this human suffering recognizing ignorance as the root cause of it. In this case the Buddha is often compared to a physician who pointed out a serious disease, found the cause, prescribed the medicine as remedy for this disease. In this sense we might say that he was a realist, capable of seeing things as they are.

3. What is the unique status of the Buddha?

"Buddha" means "The fully enlightened One". Before giving the first sermon at the deer park, he made it clear to the five ascetics who later became his first group of disciples that the supreme knowledge is self-discovered, not something handed down to him through tradition or teachers. That "Truth" has always been there, but he discovered it himself. There is no "Other Power" handing it to him.

The Buddha is definitely not a “prophet” in the Christian sense, to be a “prophet” is to be a “mouth piece” of God, he is chosen by God to proclaim what God wants to convey to people. The “Truth” is revealed to him by God. To say that the Buddha is a “prophet” is to deny outright what the Buddha himself made clear, namely that it is a self-discovery.

In the same way, among three world religions with a God concept, Christianity provides a unique status for Christ as “son of God”, a status not found in any other “Godly” religions. To deny Christ the status of “son of God” is to deny the essential message of Christianity.

4. Is there a place for God in Buddhism?

Buddhism is non-theistic. I purposely use the term non-theistic to differentiate it from atheistic. Buddhists do not deny God as such, but whether there is God or not is not our immediate concern at this point when human beings are facing suffering in the world. The classic example is that of a man wounded by an arrow. We should not waste time asking about the cause of it, e.g. who shot him, what the arrow is made of, etc. but should put all the effort on concentrating on how to overcome the immediate suffering.

In this sense, as a Buddhist, I will not indulge myself arguing about the existence of God, as it is ethically unprofitable. (That includes the questions about the world, e.g. who created it? when was it created?) For members of other religions who believe in God, that is well and good as long as it leads them out of suffering. In this respect, as a Buddhist, I can remain in peace with an atheist as well as a theist.

Philosophically if one wants to pursue a dialogue along the line of “God or no God” a Buddhist scholar may introduce the concept of “Nirvana” which is the ultimate spiritual goal of Buddhists and may try to compare this concept to the “God” of the theists, realizing of course, that “God” is a personalized form of that Ultimate Reality. The philosophical concept of Brahman in Indian philosophy is also undescrivable and characterless.

5. What is the administrative structure in Buddhism?

The status of “Pope” as supreme religious authority as in Roman Catholicism has no place in Buddhism. Instead the Buddha introduced and established a democratic structure of administration to be followed within Buddhist communities. In each Buddhist country, the Sangha or community of senior Buddhist clergy follow a collective decision arrived at through democratic consensus and passed down to its members to put into practice.

Meditation, a very common mental practice among Buddhists may be prescribed according to each one’s temperament. Here, one sees clearly the respect for individuals’ differences. In fact there are forty types of samatha (concentration) and six different types of vipassana (insight meditation). Therefore, even at a personal level, Buddhism recognizes individual differences. Yet within its framework there is unity among the differences which all finally lead to the same goal.

This attitude of open-mindedness is seen even in the teaching of the Buddha himself when he preached to the Kalamas (villagers from Kalama) that one should not believe simply because it is the work of a teacher or even the Buddha. One should consider a statement acceptable only after having put it to the test in one’s own experience. Such an attitude leaves much room for Buddhists to listen to the teaching of other religions or teachers other than their own.

6. As a Buddhist, who is responsible for your spiritual salvation?

Buddhism is a religion of this world, and therefore puts a strong emphasis on the responsibility of one’s self, particularly in early Buddhism. One’s own spiritual development depends totally on what one does oneself here and now. One cannot control the actions of the past but one can control the future by laying a foundation of good actions in the present. With this emphasis, no one, not even the Buddha can help a person towards his or her own enlightenment. Such an attitude needs a very strong and mature personality. With the sense of self-inadequacy, Buddhists of a later period developed a belief in Bodhisattvas (Buddhist saints or saviors) who vow to help sentient beings, and thus help them towards the path of enlightenment.

This development, though later, cannot be rejected as non-Buddhist. In Buddhist teaching itself there is much room for compassion, and the concept of Bodhisattva fits in well with the overall teaching of Buddhism. Though it is true that such belief encourages psychological leaning on the "Other Power", in reality one must depend on oneself in working towards one's spiritual goal. Having faith in Bodhisattvas or the Buddhas must be coupled with one's own effort.

The belief in the "Other Power" at the practical level may in fact lead to the practice of polytheism, the belief in many gods. But Buddhism finds itself flexible enough to adjust to such a belief within its structure and explains that even the gods are not free from samsaric (rebirth) world.

7. Why is Buddhism so appealing to the Americans?

The United States with its free spirit went through a period when its people were fed up with conservative, institutionalized religions, and particularly during the 1960s the Americans expressed this search for spiritual freedom in the hippy movement. Many Americans were searching for a kind of spiritual pattern of belief and practice that would provide more individual freedom. They started looking beyond their own country. At that time Zen Buddhism was already available in the US. This school of Buddhism sprang from the frustration of a highly philosophical engagement among Indian Buddhist circles. Zen Buddhism introduced a new form of Buddhist practice completely free from textual obligation and institutionalized rituals emphasizing only the direct experience, from mind to mind which fit perfectly well with the need of the Americans at that time.

Another trend came when H.H. the Dalai Lama fled Tibet in 1959. For the first time the West began to receive teachings from Tibetan teachers from a very colorful cultural context which again fit in a certain pattern that the Americans were searching for. As a result, a decade ago it was reported that there were at least five millions of Buddhists in the U.S.

8. Is there any country where pure Buddhism is practiced?

I am afraid not. Each country which has adopted Buddhism as its main religious belief had previously its own local beliefs and practices. Buddhism has an inclusive nature to blend in with the local beliefs and practices as long as they do not conflict with the main teaching.

In Thailand, before accepting Buddhism in the 13th century, we practiced Animism, a belief in spirits, e.g. the spirit of the house. This belief does not clash head-on with the essential teaching of Buddhism. Therefore, it blended into our culture. In fact there are at least three major strands of religious beliefs intertwined in what we call Thai Buddhism, namely Animism, Hinduism and Buddhism. They are practiced together; often the Thais themselves are unable to distinguish one from the other.

9. The place of women in the lives of the Buddha and Jesus Christ

I am stealing the show and would like to add some information with regard to women, a subject close to my heart.

In a comparative study one finds very interesting points both in the lives of the Buddha and Jesus Christ, particularly with regard to the special respect shown by both of them to women.

In Buddhism, when the Buddha allowed women to join the Order, it was on the basis that women were equal to men in their potentiality towards spiritual enlightenment. The Buddha was the first religious leader to proclaim this equality openly. This brings Buddhism to the level of a world religion, that is, there is no racial, no caste, no gender barrier towards spiritual enlightenment.

In Christianity, Jesus Christ first wanted to look for "the lost sheep of Israel", but was challenged by a gentile woman who had equal faith in Christ. As a result he had to make available his teaching and service both to the Jews and the gentiles. By so doing it broadened Christianity from a national religion limited only to the Jews to a religion for the world at large.

It was recorded that only women were witnesses at the crucifixion, and the resurrection scene was first revealed to women. In Buddhism both monks and nuns were equally praised by the Buddha for their spiritual enlightenment. The Buddha established four groups of Buddhists, namely monks, nuns, lay men and lay women to be responsible for either the growth or decline of Buddhism.

Again it was a woman who offered very expensive oil to anoint the body of Christ before his crucifixion. Before enlightenment, it was Sujata, a woman, who brought food which the prince ate and regained his strength after a long fast and self-mortification.

It is not beneficial to dwell on the difference of whether we are Buddhists or Christians. The troubles arise when we pay only lip service to our being Buddhists or Christians. What is more important is a sincere commitment to examine ourselves as Buddhists or Christians. If we follow our own path sincerely we could be walking very close to each other, not only for our own individual happiness but for the happiness of the world.



Devotion led by African participants

BIBLE STUDIES

Amy REUMANN

Day One Presentation

The Time is Fulfilled: Jesus Christ

Opening Prayer



Almighty God, Alpha and Omega, Beginning and End, be with us in the sharing of your Word that your power and presence may shine through our encounter with Holy Scripture. Illumine, challenge, shape and comfort us. Amen.

Bible Study Norms

I am going to ask that we agree to four different norms, or guidelines, in our study together of Scripture this week. We will always begin with a respect for diversity, for we are coming as believers from different regions, with different genders, diverse ways of understanding Scripture and the world around us. To

help us respect one another I ask that we try to listen before we speak, and to encourage those in our small groups who haven't spoken to do so. I ask that we leave time for silence, to let any gaps in our conversation not as holes to be filled but as space for the Spirit to work. Finally, I ask that we be prayerful in our consideration of Scripture, and include prayer as the essential beginning and end of each session.

Overview of Bible Studies

This week we will consider the topic of time as our overarching theme for the week. My job each day will be to give shape to our consideration of God's word - your task will be to give content through sharing your experience, your opinions, your fears and your hopes through witnessing to one another in small groups. There may be some rough spots in this process because we come with different languages and different ways to express ourselves. When you find yourselves getting frustrated at some of the communication barriers, remind yourselves that our different languages are also a blessing to one another. Be patient, listen hard, open your heart.

Day One Presentation

The Time is Fulfilled: Jesus Christ

I have one question to bring before you this week, and that question is: "What time is it?" That question may seem easy enough to answer, if you look at the clock, it's 9:15 on Monday, June 30, 1997. This means that the first day of the Pre-Assembly Youth Conference is running right on time much to Ondrej's and Birgitta's relief. On a second look, it's not such a simple question, however. We have all had experience with time in getting here, gaining or losing time as we made our way from around the world. We don't just consult our watches to tell time, we also consult our bodies, and if you are like me you are having a hard time convincing your body that it really is morning and not midnight, or that this is time to be awake and not asleep.

There are many different ways to tell time. The clock of science does not run according to hours and minutes, but is measured by the creeping expansion of the universe through space. The Second Law of Thermodynamics measures time as entropy, the slow and steady breakdown of all matter into inevitable nothingness that will mark the end of time.

The theme that runs through these Bible studies is the theme of time, how God is active in time and beyond time, and the ways in which our faith in God offers us a way to use the time that we have been given. It will mean learning to tell time not just by the hands on a clock, and not just with our bodies, but also with the resources of Scripture, tradition, and the context from which we come. And remember, holy time is not told by how things come apart, but ultimately marked by a God who holds them together.

The theologian Paul Tillich said that, "time is our destiny, time is our hope, and time is our despair." Time is our destiny because we are born into time, we swim through it from a beginning to an endpoint, accumulating birthdays along the way. Time is also our despair, it is a non-renewable resource like the rainforest, and none of us ever knows with certainty when our personal store is going to run out. Time is our despair for it tells us we have a beginning and an end. Time can be our enemy, for most of us live too busy lives, whether we are students with deadlines, parents with children, or busy people trying to squeeze 30 hours of living into a 24-hour day.

Time is also our hope. I don't mean this in the too easy assurance that time heals all wounds, for time doesn't necessarily do that, only God heals all wounds. Still, time is our hope because it gives us a past, a present, and a future. Hope must always have roots, it's a green, growing thing. As people of faith we hope in time, because we have a memory, remembrance of what God has done in the past and proclaimed through Scripture. We recall and reenact that memory through bread and wine, water and word. Time is our hope because it always promises a future. Christian hope points beyond the constraints of time itself, towards the realm of eternity where God reigns. We hope in time and beyond time, towards the possibility of a new creation.

Our text for today is from the first chapter of St. Mark, "*Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.'*"

Each gospel writer has their own version of what the beginning was all about. Luke starts us off with the scene of Mary and Joseph, a manger, and some angels on a hillside in Bethlehem. Matthew thinks another sort of beginning is important and starts his first chapter with a list of genealogies stretching all the way back to Abraham and Sarah to assure his readers that the good news began in that way, with a promise made to a desert chieftain and his wife. And John starts us off with poetry saying, "*in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*"

But Mark doesn't bother with anything like that. Mark is always short and sweet and to the point, which is why I like him. The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, Son of God, he announces with his first line. He's not so concerned with how Jesus got there or who he's related to. Mark wants us to know immediately that Jesus is here, right now, at this time, that he is the best news anyone could hope for. In just a few short verses Jesus is quickly baptized by John, driven out into the wilderness for a test run, and then launched right into his ministry. And Mark doesn't make the reader wait to find out who this Jesus is or what he is about, for Jesus pronounces right there in verses 14 and 15, "*Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the Gospel of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news.'*"

Now when Jesus says, "*the time is fulfilled,*" what does he mean? It's not language that we tend to use in our own lives. We may be concerned that we are fulfilled, filled with good things like meaningful work, loving relationships, but what does it mean that the time is fulfilled?

Time is fulfilled means that the time is short. Jesus is saying that time is up. As a child I lived in constant fear of nuclear war. It seemed a sure thing that one of the super-powers would trigger global destruction, after which there would be no one left to say who's to blame.

Jesus is telling us that our time is short and it certainly seems that way sometimes. Nuclear cataclysm seems less probable than previously, but the rise of regional conflicts and ongoing agonies in Rwanda, in the former Yugoslavia, in the Sudan and in Sri Lanka do not bode well for the future of our world. As young people we grow up in an age of AIDS, which has cut the time short for many of our contemporaries. Time is short, and I am alarmed by how many teens in my own country have chosen to shorten their own time. This is done through the plague of drugs, through crack and heroin, uppers and downers, used as an escape from what seems like an unfulfilled existence. In the inner cities of my nation, violence is the norm for children who don't expect to grow

up, and therefore have nothing to lose. Others choose to shorten their time through suicide, and the rate has been climbing steadily and alarmingly just in this decade, as youth see no future and no hope.

The Time is Fulfilled - to understand we have to ask what Jesus meant by time. In the Greek of the New Testament there are two different words for time: the first word is "chronos." It refers to what it sounds like, chronological time. Chronos is our usual answer whenever someone asks, "what time is it?" Chronos is the time that we can measure with watches, calendars, sundials, or alarm clocks. Chronos tells us that tonight at midnight Hong Kong will be handed over from Britain to China. Scripture is full of instances of chronos, like Luke when he says, "*in the year that Quirinius was governor of Syria*," allowing us later day biblical detectives to determine the year of Jesus birth. Scripture tells us to rest on the seventh day and Jesus rose on the third one. History is built upon chronos and is usually what we have in mind when we think about time.

Yet there is another word for time and that word is "kairos." Kairos is significant time. When you ask, "what kairos is it," you're not asking about the time of day, the day of the year, the time for the coffee break. Kairos is the time of opportunity. Kairos is the time when things change. Kairos redirects our gaze from watching the clock to watching the horizon. It was kairos when Moses lifted his hands, the Red Sea waters parted and the children of Israel were able to cross to safety. It was kairos when Mary and the women met an angel in an empty tomb and ran forth to announce, "He is risen!" It was kairos when Paul got knocked off his donkey and changed his job description from persecutor to apostle.

Kairos is not restricted to days gone by. Kairos walked with Nelson Mandela as he strove from decades of imprisonment, a free man. It was kairos who danced on top of the Berlin Wall, forgetting both yesterday and tomorrow at a moment of sheer jubilation.

Kairos is God's time. Over and over Scripture affirms for us that God is a God of chronos, a God of history, a God at loose in our world of ordinary days and ordinary deeds. Kairos is when God punctures our now in ways that cannot be ignored, or explained away, lifting our eyes from the details of life to its potential and possibilities. Kairotic moments are those that catch you off guard, that speak to you with power, that call you by name forcing you to look at what you didn't have the courage to face before.

I experienced kairos fourteen years ago, when I was a participant at the PAYG in Budapest. Our theme was : "The Future is Now!" and we lived that out in two weeks of non-stop kairos. We gathered as Lutheran youth from around the world, encountering one another in our differences, confronting our prejudices and exploding stereotypes. We debated, argued, listened hard and forgave. We grappled with painful issues that divided us North from South, East from West, rich from poor. We stayed up talking, laughing and singing all night and came back in the morning for more. And in that 10 days' time we solved all the problems of the world. It's not that we had the final solutions to apartheid, poverty , capitalism, exploitation, sexism and the rest, but we had the will for God had broken in among us. We had the energy, the power and the conviction to make the future break in, and the kingdom of heaven to shine among us.

Until, that is, we surged into the Assembly, as stewards and delegates. And some of us stained our fingers purple and black by spending 12-hour days churning out documents in the publication room, while others confronted long presentations, lengthy resolutions and decisions to study issues instead of solving them. We had an hour-long youth presentation to be sure, but that we viewed as a diversion from the real business of the Assembly. Some of us choked on anger, discontent, frustration with the LWF's way of doing things. The future wasn't anywhere near us.

The hard thing about kairos is that it's God's time - not ours to decide. We may have thought that we were ready to take on the world, and to build the kingdom there and then. But the kingdom is not ours to build, either. God's kingdom is not a place, but a way of life lived fully in the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. What Jesus tells is the gospel that God is fully present among us, the time is here. Salvation is not off some day in the distant future, but the future is now. God's kingdom is near enough to smell it. Live as if this is so, repent and believe, and you will really see things.

What time is it? This is a difficult question for Christians, because we understand ourselves to be in a strange, middle time, between already and not yet. Already, because the time is fulfilled. Jesus Christ is the gospel of God who has given us all we need for life and salvation. Not yet because we still live East of Eden in the brokenness of sin through which we can glimpse the kingdom and hope for our final healing.

Sometimes we get stuck in one or the other. Some of us get stuck in the not yet, and since the kingdom isn't fully evident we lose faith and wander off, thinking it's all a sham, missing Jesus' call to live as if the kingdom is already present, to start small as a mustard seed, and great things will happen. Others get stuck in the already, and believe that since salvation has been announced no response is required.

"The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of heaven is at hand - repent and believe in the Good News." We live in the unbearable tension between the already and the not yet. Let us keep our eyes on Jesus the Christ, the fulfillment of time, who illumines what it is to be captive to time and at the same time freed to live in eternity.

Day One Handout - The Time is Fulfilled: Jesus Christ

1. **Gathering. (6 minutes)** To begin, small group introductions will be made. In turn, give your name, home church, occupation. Explain the origin of your name, what it means and why it was given to you. The person with the shortest first name is the group convener. The group convener's task is to keep the conversation flowing, to prompt the group with questions, and to finish the study on time!
2. **Bible Study - Swedish Marking Method.* (20 minutes)** Read Romans 1:1-17 in silence. Undertake an individual study of the text. Carefully mark an idea, thought or verse with one of the following symbols:

Underline those passages which seem important.

The candle - pointing out something that is new, a new understanding, new insight, new appreciation.

The arrow - showing that the reader relates a verse to his or her own experience.

The question mark - indicating anything that is not clear or which puzzles you.

The passage should be marked according to what the Word says to the reader. Some persons will have many markings and others few. The markings will differ from one individual to another.
At the convener's invitation, share these findings with the whole group. Discuss.

3. **Prepare a "One Minute Gospel" (20 minutes)** Discuss these questions:
Who is Jesus Christ to you?
What excites you about the gospel?
What are your greatest questions or confusions about the gospel of Jesus Christ?

Think about what you would say about the gospel of Christ if you had only one minute with a person in need. Write and share a "one minute gospel" on the cards in front of you. Use your own terms and language.

"One minute gospels" are to be written on cards or sheets of paper. Following the feedback sharing, participants are invited to place their "gospel" where they have been seated, and to walk around and view the other statements in the room. After the session these will be hung around the periphery of the room, or affixed to a place allowed by the hotel. They are to remain there for the rest of the week.

* From Lois Leffler, Bible Study Methods, Lutheran Church Women, L.C.A.

Day Two Presentation

The Time to Hear: The Word of God

Most of the issue groups before the Assembly in Hong Kong have been of concern to the LWF for years: human rights, ecumenical concerns, justice and peace. One is new, and is titled "Values, Power and the Information Society". It recognizes that one of the fastest-changing areas of life in this century is the availability and speed of many forms of communication - so much that it threatens to overwhelm us.

In the United States, as in many countries, there is a particular sort of fast-moving communication that existed before E-mail, satellites and the World Wide Web - the bumper sticker. Bumper stickers are an outgrowth of the American love affair with the automobile, and with individual self-expression. So you can continue to communicate who you are or what you believe in as you whiz along a six-lane freeway in Los Angeles, or trundle along a back road in Arkansas. Your bumper sticker may say you voted for Bill Clinton, or that you support Greenpeace. It may declare your patriotism ("Our Country: Love It Or Leave It"). Or, as is often the case, your bumper sticker may say something about your religious convictions. "Honk if you love Jesus" is one, and "God is coming - and is She mad!" is another. One that you used to see quite frequently read: "God said it - I believe it - that settles it."

Today we will approach the subject of the Word of God, which is what we witness to. Too often, when Christians talk about the Word of God they get stuck in a bumper sticker sort of approach, saying "God said it - I believe it - that settles it", transposing any and all of Scripture directly into their time and place. This is dangerous, because any two Christians may read the same words out of the Bible, but come to entirely different conclusions as to the actual Word of God communicated. Thus Christians at opposite sides of the table when it comes to abortion, euthanasia, homosexuality or slavery, all making claims according to how they have heard the Word of God.

When we say we are Lutherans, we are simultaneously stating that we are never satisfied with simply quoting what the Bible says as the Word of God. Discipleship means to be drawn to a discipline of understanding. To be Lutheran is to follow the habit of our founder and to always be engaged in a search for understanding of God's Word. How many of us had to memorize during our confirmation Luther's explanations to the Articles of the Creed? Luther was never content to memorize, but always asked "What does this mean?" before he dared to address something as the Word of God.

To find out what the Word of God is, we turn first to the Bible, only to discover that it's used in different ways:

- * in Paul's Letters the Word of God is a message with particular contents, most specifically it is a message about Jesus Christ;
- * it can refer to the person of Jesus as the Word as God incarnate, especially in the first chapter of John and again in Revelation 19;
- * or it can appear as the Old Testament, the Bible of the early church. The term "Word of God" appears 241 times in OT - over half of them read "*The Word of the Lord came to . . .*" which is always a signal to us that some poor prophet is about to be sent out with another impossible message. But it's never quite the same message. The Word of the Lord came to Jonah, and he had to tell the Ninevites to repent. The Word of the Lord came to Ezekiel and he gives us weird visions of fields of bones. The Word of the Lord comes clearly to each prophet to pass along, but it's not a mass-produced, factory-sealed item stamped out of the same mold. It's hand-crafted, different according to each situation. So when we ask, "What is the Word of God" there is no one thing we can point to. Rather, we can point to many things: Jesus Christ, the message about him shared in faith, the recorded history of God's acts in Scripture.

There's another bumper sticker you can see on the highways of the USA. (You must think all I do is ride around and look at bumper stickers. Helps me keep in touch with what's going on. It's a dangerous habit, as evidenced by one written in very small print, so you have to follow the car it is on very closely, so you can read: "If you can read this then you are driving too close".)

There's another bumper sticker that reads: "Jesus is the answer". A nice, pious thing to say. A good slogan. Jesus is the answer, but what is the question? (Jeopardy) Again, Jesus Christ is the author and perfecter of our faith, he is the subject of our faith, but to what is he the answer?

When people from the northern hemisphere ask why water goes down the drain in the opposite direction here we have to ask "Is Jesus the answer to that?" No - it's gravity!

When half of you are wondering where in the world to buy stamps here to send your postcard, is Jesus the answer to that? No, you go to the hotel desk.

Now your faith in Christ may shape how you respond to crises like water flowing in the opposite direction, or a stamp shortage, but Jesus is not the answer to these things.

What I'm getting at is that I want to affirm that the Bible is full of answers, but before we use those answers, we have to know the questions. What were the questions asked by that people at the time it was written? Luther once wrote: "To understand the biblical prophecies, one must know what is going on in the land". Before the Bible was a document of timeless truths, it was a message with a specific content addressed to a particular people at a particular place at a particular time. Before we can find answers for our time in our Scripture, we have to know the situation of the past. For before the Bible is the Word of God to me, it was the Word of God for someone else.

For example: The prophet Hosea was instructed by God to "take a wife of harlotry" and have children. If the Bible is the Word of God, is this the way that God wants us to choose our spouses? Is this a timeless valid truth? God gives almost the opposite instructions to Jeremiah (Chapter 16), saying: "Do not marry or have sons and daughters." So which is the Word of God? One or the other? Both or neither?

You have to know what is going on in the land. When I am in a foreign land I am so much more alert and aware than when I am at home. A visitor from the Philippines spent several days with me last spring. We drove by an American Legion Hall and she asked "What's the American Legion?" I didn't know. There's one in every town, but I saw them so often I forgot to be curious. If we want to understand the Word of God, it is helpful to treat Scripture as more like a foreign land rather than as a familiar friend, ask questions of what is said and why, and soon you'll hear it differently.

For example you'll read Hosea, who was prophet at a time when the people were beginning to go to the wrong church. They were forsaking YHWH for Canaanite fertility cults, finding worship that included sex with ritual prostitutes vastly more interesting than chanting psalms and days of atonement. Hosea marries Gomer the prostitute as symbol of what is going on in the land, and through it comes God's Word that although you, Israel, act like a harlot - I am faithful. I will not forsake you. God's Word is a message of faithfulness, not a prescription about whom we should marry.

Or take Jeremiah. His situation was one of facing absolute destruction. Jerusalem would soon be conquered, her people carted away in chains, the Temple laid to waste. Jeremiah is not mandating zero population growth, but is asking what use is there in having children only to leave them to such a fate?

The problem with bumper stickers and slogans is that they are one-way streets in communication. They are opinions. Maybe you can honk to indicate your approval or disapproval, but they do not foster communication or promote understanding.

The Word of God is never just a statement, never a one-way street, never a slogan. The Word of God that has authority for us is not limited to the printed page of Scripture. There is a religion that maintains that God has spoken and it's all written down exactly as God said it and you believe it and that settles it. That religion is Islam, and the book is the Koran.

The Lutheran Christian understanding of God's Word and authority for us is different. The Word of God is a dialog. God doesn't speak only to hear the sound of God's voice, and then leave us to sort out the rest. The Word is a dialog, and requires participation, working through us in history to accomplish God's purpose. It's the living

Word of God because it's a conversation that builds a relationship. It sounds a call and demands a response from the hearer.

It's happening all the time in the Bible. In **Exodus** - people call for help from their slavery, and God answers. The people reply in the wilderness and God sends help. In the **Psalms** - humans respond to God expressing complaint, anger, accusation, joy, sorrow, all uttered in confidence that God will hear.

Luther had a way to express the variety of ways in which we hear the Word of God, according to our situation, is that it can be law, or it can be gospel. The law is that which drives us to our knees. Gospel is what raises us up.

As a preacher, I never know how the Word is going to be heard. I may think I've preached a real fire and brimstone sermon, and on the way out the door some sweet old lady says, "It's so good to know that God loves me so much". Any statement in the Bible can be heard either as law or as gospel, depending on the situation of the hearer. "*I am the Lord your God*" when heard by someone who has to be in control of everything, the Word of one of threatening law. But if the same promise is heard by one who is broken, abandoned, or alone "*I am the Lord your God*" is a statement full of grace and truth.

The Word of God is "To comfort the afflicted and to afflict the comfortable." The same word can do both at once. Blessed are the poor sounds different in the ocean-front luxury condos in Rio than it does in the favelas on the hills. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake sounds different to Christians in China than to Christians in Canada. The Word of God comforts us, afflicts us, changes us, demands a response from us. And we may hear it differently, but it is no less the Word of God.

When you get down to it, Jesus is not the answer. Jesus is the question, who asks: Who do you say that I am? Will you take up your cross and follow? Jesus is the question of God who asks for our response to the Word of God and keeps the conversation going.

So what is the Word of God? The Word of God is effective. My favorite passage from Isaiah reads: "*For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.*"

The Word of God is effective. The Word of God is effective, and accomplishes that for which it purposes. Creation through the Word - done! Comfort my people - done! Your sins are forgiven you - done!

The Word accomplishes its purpose. It is a Word of power. The gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith. It's never an easy Word, it comes to us as law and as gospel. It convicts, questions, demands even as it comforts, creates and gives hope. It invites us to wrestle with it as Jacob wrestled with God at the River Jabok. It's really through our struggles with the Word in its call and our response that we become ever more aware of the presence of God.

Day Two Handout: The Time to Hear : The Word of God

1. **Gathering (6 minutes)** Share what you know about your baptism, where, when and who was involved. The person with the latest baptismal date in the calendar is convener.
2. **Bible Study (40 minutes)** *The text for today is Mark 4:1-20. Read the passage aloud verse by verse in the language of the group, with each person taking one verse.*

At the lead of the convener, consider the following questions together:

- What do you think the passage said at the time that it was written?
- What is the warning of the passage? What is the promise?

- What kind of soil are you?
- What prevents your hearing the Word of God?
- What encourages your hearing the Word?
- Are the images of soil and seed helpful to you? If not, what images would be more helpful in your context?
- What does this passage teach us about evangelism?

Please spend at least the last half of your time on the following question. Share stories and examples from your experience. The group convener should be prepared to share your answers with the plenary:

What are the obstacles for the church in proclaiming the Word, especially among youth, today?
Record these answers on the brown paper "rocks" provided to the convener.

What are the opportunities for the church in proclaiming the Word, especially among youth, today? *Record these answers on the green paper leaves provided to the convener.*

Day Three Presentation

The Appropriate Time: Justice

I grew up in the city of Philadelphia, a community founded by a religious group called the Society of Friends, or Quakers, fleeing religious persecution in Britain in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. These black-hatted, plainly dressed pacifists named their new home "The City of Brotherly Love" with the hope and the prayer that it would mark a new start for them and for others. And it did, although not quite as they expected, its cobbled streets and neat brick buildings becoming the centers of organizing and activity for the Revolutionary War which would win the colonies independence from England. Later it became the first capital of a fledgling democracy, home of the constitution and the so-called cradle of liberty.

If you come to Philadelphia as a tourist, you will no doubt view what for us are its "old" buildings of some 200 years, Independence Hall and the Betsy Ross House where the first flag was made, and other sites. At some time your tour guide will take you to a long, low pavilion made of glass, with a line of people standing in the hot summer sun waiting to file inside and briefly see - a bell. This Liberty Bell was rung at the first public reading of the Declaration of Independence, and at every important event in the life of the new American democracy during its first 50 years. Around its rim is engraved "*To proclaim liberty throughout the Land*" (Lev. 25).

You can argue about how effectively the USA has followed through regarding the message of this bell. The fact that it kept cracking and had to be retired from active ringing may be a statement about how far we still have to go. It stands as a symbol and a reminder of the ideals with which the country was founded. The verse around its rim takes us to our focus for today.

Leviticus 25 reads: *You shall count off seven weeks of years, seven times seven years, so that the period of seven weeks of years gives forty-nine years. Then you shall have the trumpet sounded loud; on the tenth day of the seventh month - on the day of atonement - you shall have the trumpet sounded through all your land. And you shall hallow the fiftieth year and you shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you: you shall return, every one of you, to your property and every one of you to your family. That fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you: you shall not sow, or reap the after growth, or harvest the unpruned vines. For it is a jubilee; it shall be holy to you: you shall eat only what the field itself produces.*

The Jubilee hearkens back to the third commandment to honor the Sabbath and keep it holy, as a way to remember that God, too, rested at the end of creation, and to commemorate the liberation from slavery in Egypt, by giving all persons, free and slave, and all beasts, a day of liberty from toil.

This concern for the well-being and health not just of people and animals, but also for the land was developed even further with the declaration in Exodus of a Sabbath year: *For six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield; but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, so that the poor of your people may eat; and what*

they leave the wild animals may eat. You shall do the same with your vineyard, and with your olive orchard (Exodus 23:10-11).

From a weekly Sabbath day to every seventh year a Sabbath year in which the people were to live off what they had stored, sharing what was left with the poor and even the wild animals. A Sabbath year introduced a rhythm to lives that were hard and short. It gave rest to those who worked so hard, teaching them to live off the gleanings of the field in total reliance on their Lord. The Sabbath year showed the kind of respect for the land lost in today's world of agribusiness, seeing the earth as a living being, giving the ground a rest, a chance to replenish itself. This seventh Sabbatical year was also for the sake of the poor, leveling differences of class and caste, for all would eat the leavings of the land.

The Jubilee year is even more of a good thing. It occurs seven times the seventh year, or after the forty-ninth year, when the Sabbath of all Sabbaths was proclaimed on the Day of Atonement. The Jubilee would begin every fiftieth year, after all the people's sins had been forgiven, the scapegoat driven out into the wilderness, and thus cleansed and readied, a ram's horn would be sounded, after which an extraordinary process unknown in our day was then to take place.

The Jubilee year was more than a time of rest, but also a time of restitution. With that horn blast all debts were to be forgiven. Wiped out. Forgiven, as a sign that because God forgives everything, people are as well. Furthermore, all prisoners were to be freed. Most of those in prison were there because they owed money. Those who had sold slaves into slavery to be set free. A nation-wide program of land reform was to be carried out. Why? The land is mine, says the Lord. Therefore break up estates, return ancestral lands, restore the land purchased, sometimes stolen, from the impoverished, for a fresh start. And finally, the Jubilee announced a great feast, to which all people would be invited and have a party to mark this new beginning.

Today we have great studies and commissions to investigate the causes of hunger and need. The Jubilee went right to its heart. There is a connection between land ownership, hunger and poverty in every nation today. There is a connection between access to resources and the ability not only to survive, but to thrive. It sets out a new economic vision, in which there is no land ownership, but a communal stewardship of the land. The Jubilee recognizes that human well-being is tied up with that of the environment, and that we cannot exploit it to our own ends without reaping the consequences later. The Jubilee tells us that we have to celebrate our work for justice, and to gather all God's children in, together at one table, to share joy. Jubilee created peace, shalom, leveling walls between rich and poor, ending conflicts over land, reinstating respect for one another, for all creatures and for the soil.

What time is it? It's time for a rhythm of justice, a shift in perspective from the materialism of holding on (the one who dies with the most toys wins), to the joy of letting go and living with empty hands.

The bad news is that there is no evidence the Year of Jubilee was ever carried out in full. But Scripture tells us there were attempts to do so (Numbers 36:4; Ezekiel 46:16ff; Nehemiah 5:1-13). The idea even caught on with occupiers of Israel - Alexander the Great declared that there would be no taxes every seventh year, and Julius Caesar followed suit, too. Jeremiah castigated the rich of Jerusalem who had promised to free the slaves but then changed their minds (34:16-17).

But the Word of God is effective, and the Jubilee practice of the past continues to attract and to speak to us today. It speaks to us today as we consider the international debt of countries. This past year the government of Uganda spent only \$3 per person on health care, but it spent \$17 per person on repaying its foreign debt. Meanwhile, one in five Ugandan children will not reach their fifth birthday as a result of diseases that could be prevented through investment in primary health care. Uganda's story is not unique - the debt crisis around our globe is one of the principal social justice issues of our time. Money owed to Northern banks, to governments, and the most problematic of all - to multilateral creditors such as the World Bank, the IMF and regional development banks. Countries have to choose which to pay.

Instead of promoting development, which multilaterals were designed to do, the multilaterals have been a drain on the poorest countries. To be sure, the responsibility for the plight of poor countries is shared, governments can be

incompetent or corrupt or emerging from civil conflict. But the responsibility also lies with the multilaterals, who have made poor countries pay for some of their mistakes and miscalculations. And as always, the impact felt is the greatest on the poor, especially the urban poor, and on the environment as debtor nations attempt to catch up in payments at the cost of their natural treasures.

The Jubilee causes us to look at facts such as these and to realize we are faced with a moral problem. It tells us there is a deep crack in the foundation of our societies. It asks us if it is time to seek another way.

The Vatican has taken the lead among religious organizations to call for a year of Jubilee, to take place in the year 2000. Part of what they are working hard towards is calling for the multilaterals to free hopelessly indebted countries from all debt without condition. What time is it? It's time for justice, for a righting of wrongs and a clearing of the slate for the good of all people.

As a Jubilee people we are called to always question: What time is it? It's a time when our earth is badly bruised with deep scars across central Europe where energy-hungry nations strip mine for coal. What time is it? It's a time when the rainforests are disappearing at an alarming rate. What time is it? It's a time when the air and the streets of Bangkok tell us of the contamination of our world around us.

What time is it? It's time to have respect for the poor. It's time to have respect for God. It's time to hold a great feast, where everyone has a place at the table, for we are very good at meeting, but have forgotten how to celebrate.

The Jubilee will always be subjected to sin. It may be hopelessly utopian. It's definitely not practical. But here we have it in our Scripture as the Word of God to us. It comes to us as law and as gospel. The question is: What will be our response?

Which brings us to our text for today, at the occasion of Jesus's first sermon which almost gets him killed. He returns to his hometown, in front of all the people who knew him as a child, who know all the stories about him - you know how hard it is to be taken seriously, to be seen as an adult by people who changed your diapers and taught you in school! Jesus stands up before them and reads from the prophet Isaiah, a passage about the year of Jubilee, and then has the audacity to comment (a role reserved for rabbis) by saying "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." In effect, he announces a Jubilee.

Day Three Handout: The Appropriate Time: Justice

Seven Step Bible Study Method - 50 minutes

1. Read Luke 4:14-30 two times aloud.
2. Silence for reflection.
3. At the invitation of the leader, say out loud the word, or phrase, that speaks to you out of the text. You may say more than one! Don't comment on it at this time!
When all have shared a word or words, the leader proceeds to step four.
4. Participants who want to may now share why they chose the word(s) they did, what significance it has for them. At this stage, there is no conversation or questioning, just listening. *When all who choose to elaborate have done so, the leader proceeds to step five.*
5. Discuss, with some facilitation from the group leader.
6. Based upon this text and discussion, what does God want us to do?
In other words, what time does this text say that it is, and how shall we respond as Lutherans, as youth, as PAYC participants?

7. Open prayer.

Record the group's answers to question six on newsprint sheets, with the name of the region noted at the top. Regions will report back in the plenary, citing up to three of their responses.

Day Four Presentation A Time for Freedom: Baptism

One Easter morning in the second century, a group of women and men made their way to the back room of a small house in the city of Rome. At the center of the room was a rectangular pool full of water. "Do you believe in the God, the Father Almighty?" they were asked. "I believe." Down they were pushed, under the water. "Do you believe in Jesus Christ the Son of God, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, crucified under Pontius Pilate, died and buried and rose again the third day, to sit at the right hand of the Father, and will come to judge the living and the dead?" "I believe." Down they went again. "Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy church, and the resurrection of the flesh?" "I believe." Down they went a final time under the baptismal water.

Each of these persons had spent three years as a hearer, or catechumen. During those years they had received instruction in the faith, read the Old Testament, and taken part in worship services up until the Lord's Supper, at which point they were dismissed. After demonstrating what they had learned, these persons became candidates, and spent the next weeks before Easter being instructed in the gospel (which they were not allowed to read until that time), receiving daily exorcisms, and examined as to their honesty and compassion for the poor and sick. On the Thursday before Easter, they bathed and fasted for two days. Easter eve was spent in further preparation, until the sun peeked over the horizon. As soon as day broke, a water prayer was said, recalling all the ways God had used water for salvation. The candidates removed their clothing, renounced Satan and were rubbed all over with an oil of exorcism, and went into the water.

After their baptisms, the new Christians were presented with robes, blessed and brought out to the congregation. There they were greeted with the kiss of peace, offered a drink of water (inner baptism) offered bread and wine, milk and honey (land flowing with milk and honey).

And at some point, it is believed that what we know as Galatians 3:27-28 was also recited over the newly baptized "*As many of you were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.*"

The baptismal formula of Galatians 3 speaks to the identity of these new Christians within the social structures of the day. The three best things to be were male, a Jew and free. This meant you had power, you could own property, and you could vote. Religiously, you could lead worship, you were closer to God. The three worst things to be were female, gentile and a slave. Any one of these was enough to put you at a disadvantage. All three put you at the bottom of the heap. But whereas gentiles could convert and be circumcised, slaves could sometimes buy their freedom, women had rights only through husband, father or son. In fact, a Jewish morning prayer, the *berakot* said by each Jewish male upon awaking, expressed this by saying "Thank you God that you did not create me a gentile, an ignorant person, a slave or a woman."

This is a prayer we've heard before. Sounds suspiciously like the pharisee who prayed to God "Thank you for not making me like that tax collector over there . . ." It's a prayer that still gets prayed around our world today, in whispers and in shouts. Its a prayer that becomes frighteningly real when it is lived out with violence, fear and hate.

Thank God you made me . . . Protestant instead of Catholic
Thank God you made me . . . heterosexual instead of homosexual
Thank God you made me . . . white instead of black
Thank God you made me . . . you fill in the blank

We may not pray prayers with these exact words. But we imply them. What these prayers are really about is taking what God has created good and putting a social value on it. We are making judgements about things that God created, good things that people cannot change: their race, gender, color, their nationality or sexual orientation and especially for the poor, their class. Such prayers are a way of defining ourselves by what we aren't, instead of what we are.

These prayers are whispered in the church, and God is tired of them. The M___ family were members of my congregation in New Jersey. They drove an hour one way to attend worship services. They passed by many Lutheran churches on their way, and had tried them but had not been welcomed, with them barefoot at the communion rail and with their bright colored saris. Thank God you did not make me like this Indian, who smells of spices and is so unlike me.

My first congregation was a real model of racial integration. There were people with black skin, people with white skin and some who spoke Spanish better than English. We had our tensions, but were committed to be a church of many colors. Until the day Diane came to church with her three children. Diane was a single mother who lived with the father of her last child. She lived in a tiny apartment on a street where there was open drug dealing and gunshots were common. She scraped by on welfare, and couldn't afford to give much in the offering plate. A fact that was noticed by some. When her children, who didn't know how to behave in church, were noisy, people would shake their head and whisper: Why doesn't she stay with the poor people where she belongs?

In the United States, class is a higher wall to climb than race. We have built some congregations that are not European or Scandinavian in origin. But on the whole we are a church of the middle class, congregations of the affluent, and we have not figured out how to welcome and value the gifts of the poor. Thank God, we pray, that you have made me rich and not poor.

Women are still second-class citizens in our nations and in our churches. We see it in our structures of leadership in church and state. We see it in unequal wages for women and men. We see it in a world in which violence against women is accepted. We see it in churches in which our primary image of God is male although that violates the second commandment. We see it in the condemnation of theology done from women's experience, theology that seeks to affirm women's full humanity and mutuality with men in partnership. Such biases and blocks are neither Christian or human. What are all of us losing when we make these divisions and distinction? We are demeaning God's wisdom and God's creation. We are naysaying the teaching and practice of Christ.

Persons who are homosexual in orientation are penalized for daring to love one another in a world where there is too much hate.

As many of you were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

For the sake of the witness of the church to the gospel, we have to find ways to get beyond the divisions we learn. For they are learned, born of sin that whispers to us that in order for me to be up, you have to be down. For you to have power takes some away from me. We have to clothe ourselves with Christ in a way that our oneness in him overpowers anything we have learned about what society terms important or powerful. And although some of our churches are addressing this we will ultimately find the answer not in strategies or programs, but by reaching into the resources of our faith - baptism.

Baptism is a moment of kairos. It is a washing away of these boundaries in the waters of the font. It does not mean that ethnic, social and sexual differences vanish, but that the barriers, the hostility, the chauvinism, and the sense of superiority and inferiority between respective categories are destroyed. The social value and caste systems we create are toppled. Being clothed with Christ does not do away with Jew or Greek, male or female, even slave or free, but it makes these differences before God irrelevant.

I am always, deeply saddened by the lack of understanding of the radical nature of the sacrament of baptism and its implications for our lives. It's said that the church is the place people come to hatch, match and be dispatched - in other words when there's a birth, a wedding or a death. In many parts of our church baptism is a part of culture

religion - a nice excuse to clothe baby not in Christ but in great-grandma's baptismal gown and to have a party with lots of nice food. If there is a religious motivation, it's because many see baptism as a kind of holy fire insurance, a policy that will get you into heaven, but isn't much use right now.

I'm not sure many of those who come back to the church for its services would like to hear what it's really all about. Baptism is about life and death, a dying and a rising with Christ. Baptism is drowning that little child and raising it out of the waters only to mark it with a symbol of torture and death. Baptism is the trust in God's promise to forgive all our sin.

My brother-in-law, who is a Lutheran by marriage, remarked to me recently that although he knew that baptism is about forgiveness of sins, he didn't see what his little daughter, who at this stage doesn't do much more than smile, sleep, reach, eat and poop, had to be forgiven for yet. Although my niece is about as perfect a child you can get, she is still under the rule of sin.

Sin is not our actions, it is a state of being. Sin does not refer to separate deeds, but is a measurement of our distance from God. We gravely misunderstand our baptisms when we shrink it all down to an algebraic equation trading individual forgiveness for individual mistakes.

Sin is not only in us, dividing our hearts, but around us. Evil is bigger than we are, we neither start it, nor can we finish it, for we are born into it. Evil resides in our systems, our governments, our churches and all our structures. Social sin traps us every day, pulling us into participation in structures of evil larger than we are, that twist our actions before we can take control of them.

And so my niece already participates in original sin. She wears t-shirts made in sweatshops in Haiti and Nike sneakers made by underpaid workers in Indonesia. She is a deduction in a taxation system that benefits some while disadvantaging others, she drops Cheerios and banana pieces under her highchair while children half a world away wait to die with huge bellies and even larger eyes for want of her table scraps. She will go off to school and at about the fourth year her grades will drop in math and science because these subjects are not emphasized with girls. She will grow up and get a job and earn 68 cents to every dollar earned by a man. She will have a one-in-three chance of being sexually molested - a one-in-six chance of being beaten by her husband - and when she raises her voice about these injustices, if things do not change, she will be blamed by society, her pain ignored by the church.

We are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves. Prejudices become law. Suspicious gospel. We place value on one another. Baptism sets us free. God's action through word and water illuminates the bondage with which we live. To lifestyle. To nationalism. Social sins of racism, classism, ageism, you name it.

Baptism calls us to freedom. Freedom to reach beyond the structures to a new way of life and being. Unity based not on gender, or class or race, but on unity in Christ, on the basis of faith.

The freedom granted us in baptism is different than what we often envision as freedom. We've been sold a freedom that is defined by options, consumption, by how much choice we have. We define our freedom in a limited way, because we are never only freed from something, we are also freed for something, be it a purpose, a goal or for God.

At least in the Christian context, freedom is about love, what we love, how we love. Freedom is about commitment, God's commitment to us. Commitment is about narrowing options, closing some doors for the sake of the gospel. Freedom is choosing constraint, constraining our will to have power over others, or to make ourselves great by making others least, and to follow the example of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Day Four Handout: The Time for Freedom: Baptism

1. **Gathering (5 minutes)** What has been a challenge for you this week as you gather with youth from around the world? What has been a gift for you? (Share your responses. There will be no convener for this session - you know one another well enough to work cooperatively now!)

2. **Bible Study (50 minutes)**

(25 minutes) *Read Galatians 3:28 as individuals. This is thought to be an early Christian baptismal formula, which states the unity and equality of all people through Christ. It knit together first-century groups who were otherwise at the opposite extremes of power, status and authority in society and the church: men and women, Jews and Gentiles/Greeks, free persons and slaves.*

You are a leader in your church, charged with drafting a new baptismal formula based on Galatians 3:28. You are to rewrite it, reflecting on your own context in the light of the present time. In preparation, consider the following questions: What groups are at the opposite extremes of power and status in your society? Who are the voiceless or marginalized among your churches? What gulfs still exist due to racism, classism, sexism or other divisions? Why?

Share your baptismal formulas within your small groups and discuss.

(25 minutes) Then, consider the following questions, as you have time:

If Paul were reciting this baptismal formula today, would he still include "male and female" as a reminder of the unequal voices of women and men in church and society? Why or why not? Share an experience which informs your opinion. Discuss.

From what must we, as Lutherans and as individuals, be freed in order to embrace and to encourage the witness of all the baptized? What is the challenge of hearing the witness of those who are different from you? What is the gift? Share an experience.

"For freedom Christ has set us free". For what have you been freed as a baptized child of God? How well do you use this freedom in your own context? How can the LWF provide leadership that is freeing for the year 2000 and beyond?

For feedback in the Plenary: There will be an open prayer, in which we pray for God's children in all their diversity. The leader will pray: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female . . . *All are invited to include prayers for groups or individuals in church and society, for example, "There is no longer gay or straight", etc.* At the end of the session, you may write your prayers or concerns on the poster.

Day Five Presentation

A Time for Hope: Apocalyptic

Follows panel presentation on churches under persecution.

Thanks to those who participated in the panel, as we now make a connection between the church's experience of persecution and today's theme of apocalyptic.

On April 25, 1993, U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms and FBI stormed a compound in Waco, Texas, where members of a religious cult named the "Branch Davidians" (a branch of the house of David) were holed up. They had been under siege for 51 days, wanted by the authorities on weapons charges and suspicion of child abuse. Although the authorities had expected the cult members to put up some resistance, they were taken totally

off guard when the compound suddenly went up in flames. By the time the fires subsided 86 people, including 23 children, had perished, choosing death rather than to run to safety. There were nine survivors.

It is still unclear just what role and responsibility the U.S. Government had in this action and its tragic consequences, which included the retaliation bombing of the Federal Building in Oklahoma City just two years later. What is clear is the depth to which the government and the media had misunderstood and undervalued the religious motivation of cult members in the first place, which led them to see any outsiders as agents of the devil, and which led them to choose death over capture.

The group's leader, David Koresh, is what we would call an apocalypticist. He had formed a system of belief and built a community around his understanding of the Book of Revelation. Central to his belief is a typical aspect of apocalyptic thought, that the world, and all its structures, especially the government, are hopelessly evil and corrupt. Koresh felt that God had revealed to him alone how to unlock the secrets of the final book of the Bible, so withdrew with his followers for that purpose to a desert encampment. In anticipation of a great, final battle between good and evil which Revelation depicts on a field named Armageddon, they stocked guns, ammunition, stores of food and water, and then they waited. Rather than Armageddon they got the FBI, and an ending that was no less final and tragic.

The Branch Davidians are not the only example of groups focused on the end of time. There's Aum Shimrikyo in Japan who terrified a nation by releasing nerve gas into the subway system. And just last April twenty-some members of a group named Heaven's Gate put on Nike sneakers and laid down to die in a California mansion, certain of being transported to a spaceship behind the Hale Bop comet.

Apocalyptic thinking, which is an orientation towards the end of time, is not new in this century, and not confined to strange cults. Human beings have always been fascinated by the question of human origins, and by our ends. But whereas study of our past is respectable, speculation on our future and guesses as to the end of time are seen as less reasonable.

But we might as well get used to apocalyptic, we are going to hear more and more about it in the next years as the year 2000 approaches. The coming millennium will excite all sorts of strange and imaginative things: predictions of the End, conspiracy thinking and paranoia, speculation about environmental apocalypse and a cataclysmic ending to it all.

Turn to neighbor and briefly discuss:

What has been your experience with the Book of Revelation and apocalyptic groups in your own context? How do you react to them?

This September there will be an international conference on the millennium and apocalyptic partly hosted by the church I serve in Madison, WI with papers and speakers. But before apocalyptic is ever a realm for scholars, it captures the popular imagination.

Nathan was a street preacher in the New Jersey town where I lived some years ago. I saw him many times before I met him - long legs, rumpled clothes, marching up or down the street waving some tracts and warning whoever was passing by that they have to repent and being ready for God to arrive. Most people ignored him. I never paid him much attention until one day he ran after me and wanted to know if I was ready for Jesus to come. I said something like maybe, hoping he'd lose interest. He didn't, and walked along with me. At some point I let it slip out that I was a pastor, and then I was lost.

"The world is ending!" Nathan screamed at me, "All the signs are here, just like in the Bible. Did you know that the United Nations is trying to make one world government? Did you know that the bar codes put on food packages are really the mark of the beast and that the government wants to put one on each of our forehead?" *No one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast*" (Rev. 13:17). Nathan had learned much of this from some videos he generously shared with me to get my opinion. From that day on, whenever Nathan saw me coming, his face would light up as he got ready to try and save me once again from my coming doom.

The word apocalyptic means unveiling, or disclosure. It is a type of writing found throughout Scripture, first appearing in about 250 B.C.E., and includes writings in the Books of Daniel, Ezekiel, parts of the Gospel of Mark and the writings of Paul. Rather than unveiling much of anything for us, on the surface it makes things more confusing and hard to understand, for it speaks in symbols, numbers and codes whose original meanings lie buried under thousands of years of history. The one thing clear about apocalyptic is that, through the ages, the faithful have been eager to find out what it means, and to unlock its secrets for their own day.

One of the greatest misconceptions about apocalyptic is that people think it's about the future. It's not. It's less a telling of time to come, and more a message about the present, based upon the past experience of God's faithfulness. Historically, apocalyptic is born in a situation of national or community suffering and persecution. It is often written as a revealing to a particular prophet God's intention to overthrow enemies of the chosen people, and to bring them to freedom and peace. Because it is written in dangerous days, the symbols and codes are intended to mask its true message from enemies who might read it. Revelation is a message to comfort and encourage the faithful in the present, to assist them in their faith, by painting a picture of a time to come, a glorious time that waits for those who suffer, on the other side of today's sorrow, a future time when God's victory over evil will be final, and the triumph will be won.

Daniel wrote his stories and visions around the second century, but tells his story as if it were taking place four hundred years earlier, in Babylon during the reign of King Nebuchadnezzar: We remember the lion's den, but much of his story contains visions and messages of hope and victory for people who were in despair.

Revelation speaks to the situation of Christians in the Roman Empire at the hand of the Roman Emperor, Domitian, who announced his subjects were to address him as "Lord and God" and worship his image. Naturally this didn't go over well with a small sect who believed that only at the name of Jesus Christ should every knee bow and every tongue confess just who is Lord and God. This sort of resistance to the emperor led many to face the lions, while others, including one named John of Patmos, became religious refugees and exiles. John recorded the apocalyptic vision he received, and shared this vision with seven churches scattered throughout Asia Minor somewhere near the end of the first century, encouraging them to keep the faith as they faced persecution and hardship for the sake of their faith.

What makes apocalyptic so difficult and at the same time so fascinating is that it is written in code, or like a series of scenes and pictures to be interpreted. It uses numbers, symbols and signs to communicate its message. It is marked by dualistic thinking in which the world is divided between good and evil. All that is evil will be vanquished during the final battle, and an entirely new creation comes into being. Old things will be made new - the city of Jerusalem, who gave God so many problems with her unfaithfulness in the past, will descend from the heavens dazzling with jewels and light, for God shall live there. And the tree of knowledge of good and evil that caused so many problems for Adam and Eve will now heal the nations and bring all beings to God's holy hill. Apocalyptic told those who were watching their loved ones fed to lions, who worshiped in secret, who doubted God's power against the might of the Emperor, that God will have the final victory.

Discuss with your neighbor:

Apocalyptic holds the view that the world is getting worse. What do you think?

Apocalyptic has to do with time, and to strengthen and encourage Christians in the midst of suffering by reminding them that they are not subject only to the time in which they live. They also live in God's time, under God's rule and in God's kingdom. And in that sense, they are given a vision of the future to sustain them in the present. Apocalyptic is a prediction of a kairos to get you through the chronos.

Revelation tends to be discounted by some Christians as Biblical Science Fiction, or fairy stories that have little to do with the heart of the gospel. Others take every word, every symbol literally, and work frantically to figure out its secret message for the faithful. Spend a lot of time calculating who the 144,000 are who will get into heaven. Every so often someone else leads a group to camp out at what is thought to be the field of Armageddon, because they've calculated what the day of the last battle will be. Nathan, along with others, search for the mark of the beast, or make wild predictions about forces of evil gathering in and among familiar institutions. Unstable types like David Koresh imagine Revelation as a private word to them alone, usually with disastrous consequences.

We must go carefully with apocalyptic. It excites the creative, imaginative parts of ourselves, the parts that love puzzles, and who want to turn the word of God into a weather forecast for our future. The temptation with all forms of apocalyptic is to tie them to your particular time and place, placing your own agenda on God's, before you understand what it meant to the people for whom it was originally written. Luther himself was not immune, declaring that the beast mentioned in Revelation surely stands for the Pope. And a Catholic tract in 1785 interpreted Luther as the fallen star of Revelation and Mohammed as the beast. In our day others have identified the Common Market as the work of the beast, Rivalry between China and Soviet Union and the United States as a sign of the end to come.

We must go carefully with apocalyptic, because exclusive focus on the future is not gospel, but can lead to escapism and denial of the world. The world not ultimately evil, although sometimes feels like that - for God so loved the world, not Christians or Israel but the world, that God gave God's only begotten Son.

The Word of God is never delivered in code. It is not written so that only a favored few will grasp the Word, but is inclusive. It does not exclude, but invites. The Word of God works - flung out like seed for all to hear. It is a Word that is effective and powerful, that draws ever more into God's world than away from it.

That said, don't throw out apocalyptic, it communicates the gospel, too. The wonder of our Scripture is that it speaks to such a range of the human condition, the diversity of our experience. Christians are still persecuted today. Chinese crackdown on unauthorized Christian groups continues, as do burnings of black churches in the United States, church burnings reportedly by Muslim extremes in Indonesia, terrorist murders of Christians in Algeria, Coptic Christians tortured in Egypt.

Apocalyptic tells us important things about how humans sometimes distort the Word of God. It warns us that God's kingdom cannot be reduced to human institutions, that what we build, be it governments, be it our congregation, be it the LWF, what we build will always be touched by sin. We have the power and freedom to oppress and hurt others. But beyond the pain of living lies God's shalom, and apocalyptic says we dare not forget that by offering a brief unveiling of God's future.

Apocalyptic points us to the real meaning of the resurrection, which is the heart of our witness after all. We can witness to creation, we can witness to the social services of the church, we can witness to good things the church is doing, but the only thing that makes us different from many sects and cults, is our message, is God's salvation in Jesus Christ. It's done, accomplished, ours to receive, not so that we become perfect but that we know God stands with us and suffers with us in an imperfect world.

Above all, apocalyptic is about hope. Hope doesn't come from nowhere, hope has to have a history. The hope of faith has to be rooted, with trust in the experience you've had of God in the past to deliver you into your future. It's why at every crisis the people of Israel remembered their liberation from Egypt, and trusted God one more day. When the Word of God is planted and takes root and grows, hope is its fruit. Hope to persevere, hope to struggle, hope to live.

The hope of the Gospel is not a nice story to trick people into believing that everything is all right. It's a story that tells us the cross is firmly planted in our midst, and in the shadow of that cross it is a story that by its very telling makes us stronger.

So what do we hope for?

What do we hope for as Christians?

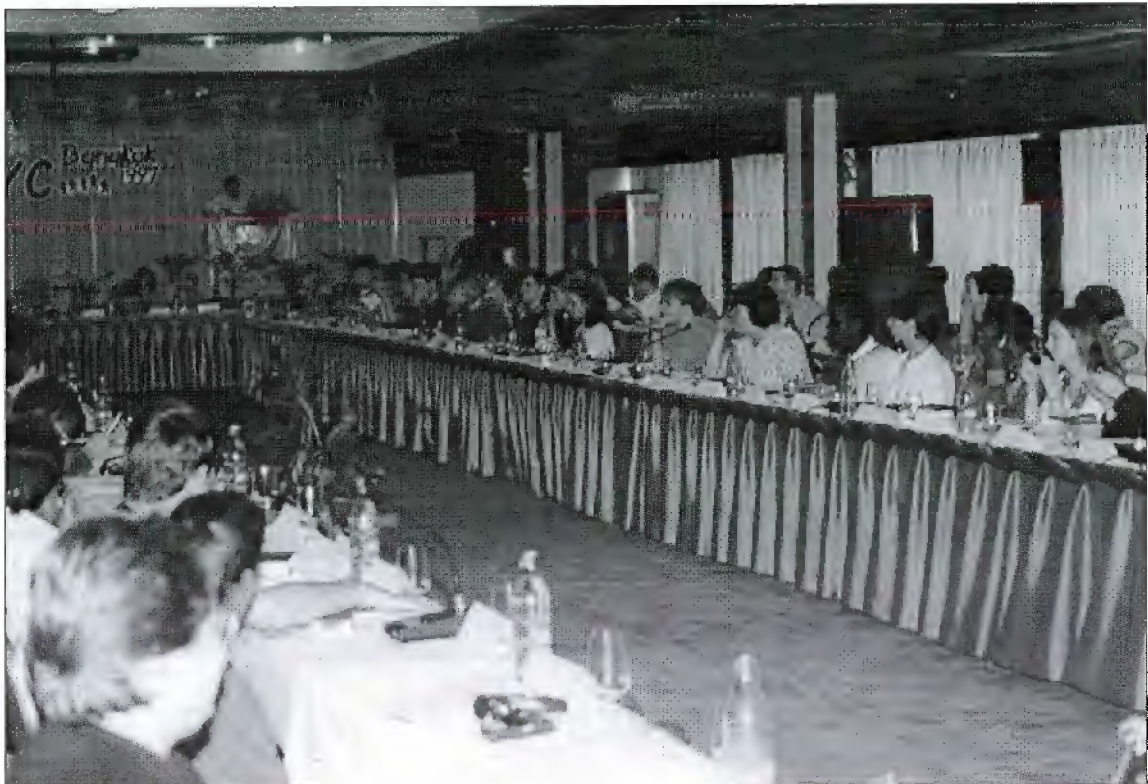
What do we hope for as Lutherans?

What do we hope for as young people for whom the future stands open, but who stagger under the burdens of the past and challenge of the present?

Our problem is that we don't hope for too much, we usually hope for too little. The message of apocalyptic tells us that we have to hope large, hope big, hope boldly. Share our hopes with one another, what we hope for our world, our church, for me and for you. Scripture always challenges us to name our hope, its source and its goal. One of the texts which says it is 1 Peter 15: "Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence."

Think about your world, your context, your faith for a moment, then turn to your neighbor and answer the question posed by the writer of 1 Peter:

How do you account for the hope that is within you?



Plenary hall at Niran Grand Hotel

GREETINGS from Ecumenical Guests

World Council of Churches (WCC)

was represented by Rev. Freddy KNUTSEN, Executive Secretary of the WCC Youth Team in Geneva, Switzerland

World Student Christian Federation (WSCF)

was represented by two PAYC participants:

Rev. Agnes PANGYANSZKY, Secretary of the Hungarian Student Christian Movement, (KÖD) and Ms. Marianne HAAGENSEN, Leader of the Oslo Branch of the Student Christian Movement
They brought greetings on behalf of Rev. Kangwa MABULUKI, Co-Secretary General of the WSCF in Geneva, Switzerland, who was unable to attend

Lutheran Institute of Theological Education (LITE)

in Bangkok, Thailand was represented by its director, Rev. Jaakko MÄKELÄ



Facilities of the Lutheran Institute of Theological Education and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Thailand where the PAYC Opening Worship took place

GREETING FROM THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES YOUTH TEAM

Freddy KNUTSEN

First of all I want to thank you for inviting me to your conference. My first international ecumenical experience was as a steward at the LWF Council meeting in 1993. During a couple of intensive weeks, which also included a Youth Pre-Conference, I did not only learn a lot, the experience was most of all inspiring, an experience that has driven me all the way to where I am today. It is also good to be here and see some of the friends that I made during those days. You have some very good days in front of you.



Today I bring you greetings from the World Council of Churches and the General Secretary Konrad Raiser. The World Council of Churches, or the WCC as we say, has 330 member churches. Some of your churches are also a member of the WCC. But we also find Baptists, Methodist, Anglicans, Orthodox together with other denominations. Why do these churches mingle with each other? Why do they stay together as churches? Two reasons: First, Christ wishes and prayed that those who believe in him may be one. Second, the common challenges like mission, justice, peace and sharing require a cooperation and communication between the churches. With the situation that we are now facing in Hong Kong, I guess that the churches in Hong Kong depend upon the churches outside Hong Kong, on your support, on the support from Lutheran Churches, on support from other churches in order not to be alone in this situation but to stand together with other people. It is this standing together as churches and responding to the needs of the world that is called ecumenism. Next year, the member churches of the World Council of Churches will meet in Harare in Zimbabwe, Africa, for our Eighth Assembly and the celebration of our 50th anniversary. Prior to this Assembly young delegates and stewards will meet for a similar event like this, to the Pre Assembly Youth Event.

I could now tell you about the structure of the WCC and the different programs that we have, but I rather want to use the opportunity to address some more important concerns. From Ondrej's report yesterday we heard about the difficulties and the crisis the ecumenical movements are facing today. Some people are saying that we are experiencing an ecumenical winter. The involvement of people in the churches is not the same as it was some years ago. There may be many reasons for this winter, but we know that after winter comes spring. And if we take a look at the start of the ecumenical movement, at its first spring, young people played a significant role through the student movements. You are attending and you are going to attend a meeting that will set priorities for the future. When visions and plans are made today, remember that without young people there will be no ecumenical spring. Therefore, I don't want to address you as coming leaders of the church as many say. As young people you are today's leaders of the church. As young people you are taking important decisions today. Your priorities and commitment today will control and determine tomorrow. A lack of interest today will have its implication for tomorrow. Therefore, as we just heard in the Bible study we can say that the future is now. This gives us a challenge, both for us young people here in Bangkok, but also for those who are not present here but will be present in Hong Kong, to listen to our voices as younger people. Therefore, true leaders of the church, take a look at Jeremiah, take a look at Peter, take a look at Mary, they were young people. They were all young people when they were called by God, called by God to do important tasks. You are young people today and you are also called by God to do important tasks for your churches, whether it is within the LWF or within your local congregations. So, be not ashamed - God is expecting something of you. God has expectations of you as he had of Jeremiah, Peter and Mary. He did not wait till Peter had written many books and finished his thesis.

I want to end my greetings to you here with this challenge and I wish you all the best for the rest of the meeting. I will be together with you, listening to you, learning and preparing for my Assembly next year. Thank you.

GREETING
from the World Student Christian Federation
Kangwa MABULUKI

Chairperson, dear delegates and other guests to this important conference,

I wish to bring warm greetings and best wishes to you all from the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF).

The WSCF is an international student organization which serves to unite students across barriers of race, gender, religion (denomination, confession), to bring them into mutual fellowship with one another, and into service and witness for Christ, working for the unity and mission of the church and for peace in the world.

From its humble beginnings in Vadstena, Sweden, in 1895, the Federation is historically the first international ecumenical student organization and a forerunner of the modern ecumenical movement. The Federation has through its history played a key role in ecumenical leadership formation providing most if not all the key leaders at the founding of the World Council of Churches in 1948. The Federation provides an opportunity for young people not only to undergo ecumenical spiritual formation, but also to have opportunities for meaningful political and social engagement. At each point in its history, the Federation has taken up the challenge to address key social, political, or economic issues from a faith perspective.

Today the Federation has 97 student groups generally called Student Christian Movements (SCM) all over the world. The composition of the groups vary and so does their specific program focus.

Chairperson, dear delegates,

Having been invited to this conference as ecumenical partners, and in a spirit of fostering ecumenical cooperation and dialogue, I wish to restate our commitment to ecumenical cooperation and also underline the urgency we have especially as young people to effectively contribute to foster ecumenical cooperation and dialogue which is very essential.

I believe there is need for enhancing our understanding of ecumenism and participating effectively and being in the fore front in the current process of renewing and perhaps even re-articulating the wider ecumenical vision and agenda at this point in the life of the Ecumenical Movement as we look towards the 21st century.

The subject of ecumenism is as you know quite wide that I even hesitate to start commenting on it. Given the context and the country in which you are holding your conference, one cannot avoid being reminded of the need to reflect on ecumenism as relates to other faiths especially Buddhism. But I will confine my brief comments to unity within and among the Christian church and organizations.

For us as WSCF, Ecumenism is a living reality. By our very nature we are an ecumenical organization because as indicated earlier, our members are drawn from different denominations and confessions. But we do not stop here, we also seek as an organization to work closely with churches and other Christian organizations. In both these ways we do not take ecumenism lightly or pretend it is easy.

The synthesis report of our last General Assembly states some understanding of this ecumenism towards which we work in the following words:

“As a general precursor to a deeper understanding of ecumenism, we need to reassure one another that it is not about uniting superficially at the expense of the richness or experiences of our confessional backgrounds. ...we must learn to find appropriate ways of speaking and listening to one another... Ecumenism is about being one in Christ but at the same time maintaining an identity as churches in our cultures and local situations.”

Our ecumenism is one which affirms unity in diversity. It is the ecumenism which calls us to listen carefully to each other and appreciate the richness of our denominational or confessional backgrounds and then coming with

those to enrich one another to challenge as well as affirm and encourage one another. The image we are given in scripture of being “one body” best illustrated this unity for which we strive. Like in the body, what makes our diversity not degenerate into spiritual pride, destructive negative competition, conflict, strife and elitist tendencies is our interdependence. To realize that we are interdependent also requires talking and listening to each other and taking each other seriously.

The affirmation of the LWF that “to be Lutheran is to be Ecumenical” is very important, it underlines this view of ecumenism as unity in diversity.

Dear Brothers and Sisters, let me also underline a fact which you know well, that ecumenism as we learn from the scriptures is not an option, it is a Gospel imperative. In working for true ecumenism, we are being obedient to the deep desire and wish of Christ which he expressed in his high priestly prayer “That they may all be one” (John 17:21). And this unity as you also know is essential for the Christian witness “...That the world may believe that you sent me” (John 17:23).

Dear Sisters and Brothers, let me make a brief comment with regard to the theme of the conference, which as far as I understand from the preparatory papers is “Be not ashamed - Christ has set us free.”

“Globalization” has now become a household word. But contrary to all the acclaimed anticipated positive effects of this process, and all the fine sounding statistics pointing to the positive economic impact of the process, we continue to witness all around us the adverse effects of economic globalization. The worsening hopeless conditions of poverty and degradation which many people especially in countries in the south (and now even an increasing number in the north), find themselves in continues to have severe effects especially on young people. Hence we see an increase, in the number of street children, child labor and child prostitution. These and many other conditions can all be summed up in one word “Dehumanizing”. Such conditions should bring about concern and “shame”. This in one respect poses a challenge to the theme of this conference. “Be not ashamed - Christ has set us free”. I know there has been extensive expositions by our key note speakers, but I cannot help, in light of what I have very briefly pointed out above, to raise these questions: can we in the midst of these ever increasing dehumanizing conditions boldly tell ourselves and those around us not to be ashamed? Ought we not be ashamed when human life is so degraded, so cheapened, when thousands upon thousands are compelled out of no choice of their own to lead lives that are below human standards?

Well, when from our Christian faith and hope we reflect on the second part of the theme, we can indeed find cause not to be ashamed...”because Christ has set us free...” This we indeed say at the risk of sounding simplistic. But at the very heart of our belief as Christians is the understanding that through his ministry and his suffering and shameful dehumanizing death on the cross, Christ exposed, confronted and overcame the powers of evil both in their seen form as oppressive institutions and in their unseen form as powers and principalities of this age. Through his resurrection he won the victory. Because of this victory he has set us free not to pretend that it is well or recline in our comfortable positions or to wallow in our shame and despair, but has set us free to work for the manifestation of God’s kingdom which is marked by justice, peace and dignity for all. Christ has called us and set us free to look right in the face of shame, despair and helplessness and be able to see hope and to work for all that

brings about fullness of life and human dignity. For the one who has set us free came “that all may have life in its fullness” (John 10:10).

I wish you dear, Brothers and Sisters, God’s courage, grace and peace success as you continue this conference as you continue to explore that freedom which Christ has given us in all its breadth, depth and richness.

God bless you all.



Marianne Haagensen and Agnes Pangyanszky presented this greeting on behalf of the WSCF

GREETING

Lutheran Institute of Theological Education

Jaakko MÄKELÄ

1. Introduction to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Thailand



Honored participants of the LWF Pre-Assembly Youth Conference,

I have the privilege to introduce you to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Thailand.

In Thailand, Christians form about a half percent of the population. Yet, there has been freedom to proclaim the gospel and Christianity in Thailand for hundreds of years.

Permanent Catholic work started in Thailand in the middle of the seventeenth century. The Protestant work started 170 years ago. One of the first Protestant missionaries to arrive in Thailand was a German Lutheran, Karl Gützlaff.

He was not sent by any Lutheran agency but by the London Missionary Society. After that Lutheran missionaries by-passed Thailand for more than a hundred years.

2. Theological and ecclesiastical traditions

In the beginning of the 1990s, the Protestant community was estimated to be 140 000. It is divided into several groups according to theological traditions. On the other hand, the government policies have shaped the organizational forms of the Protestant community.

Historically, American evangelicalism has had a deep influence on the Protestant community. The majority of the missionaries have come from North America.

Until the Second World War, the Presbyterian tradition was dominant in Thailand. The Baptists have been present in Thailand from the early years of the Protestant work, and they are divided into several groups.

After the Second World War, the situation changed drastically. The number of missionaries as well as the number of mission agencies increased. This can be seen as an expansion of the work, at the same time it can be seen as an increasing division. After China was closed to foreign missionaries, several Evangelical mission agencies moved their work to Thailand. After the War also several groups of Pentecostals arrived in the country. The Pentecostal tradition has contributed to the birth of independent churches as well. In the 1950s some Lutherans started to show interest in Thailand.

3. Government policies shaping the Protestant community

Christianity is one of the officially recognized religions in Thailand. The Church of Christ in Thailand, comprising mostly the Presbyterians and some Baptists, was established in 1934. Since its establishment it has been recognized by the Government agencies.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the arrival of new missions created a new situation. It was not possible to reconcile their theological and ecclesiastical traditions with the Presbyterian-dominated Church of Christ in Thailand. In order to get official recognition, they had to seek co-operation among themselves. At the same time, a number of independent congregations were also formed. In 1969, a co-operational organization called the Evangelical Fellowship in Thailand was established. It comprises organizations from different traditions: Pentecostals, various Evangelicals,

some Presbyterians and Lutherans. It has been recognized as the second major Protestant organization by the Government agencies.

3. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Thailand

In the 1950s, the American Lutherans and the German Marburger Mission sent some missionaries to work together with the Church of Christ in Thailand in Northern Thailand.

In the 1970s, the Norwegian Missionary Society and the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission were considering to expand their ministries in Asia. At the same time, the Asian Lutheran churches were opening to the idea of their own mission work. In 1978, a Lutheran World Federation sponsored consultation was held in Manila. In that consultation the partnership of the Asian churches in cross-cultural mission was explored.

The Norwegian Missionary Society sent its first missionaries to Thailand in 1976 and the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission in 1978. When the formal agreement on mission co-operation in Thailand was negotiated (1980), it was done with the understanding that, hopefully, the Asian Lutheran churches would join the ministry later. This happened quite soon. The first to join was the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hong Kong (1982), followed by the Lutheran Church in Malaysia and Singapore (1988) and latest the Kinki Evangelical Lutheran Church in Japan (1995).

The formation and the ministry of the Lutheran Mission in Thailand reflects the new situation in mission co-operation. The Asian and African churches have become partners in cross-cultural mission. Mission is not any more a Western enterprise. The work in Thailand has also been an experiment in searching ways for evangelization and church planting in big cities. The work started in Bangkok.

The goal for the Lutheran Mission in Thailand was to "establish local congregations, which shall be united into one Evangelical Lutheran Church". This clearly stated goal influenced the work in many ways. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Thailand was established and the first bishop was elected in 1994. The Lutheran Mission in Thailand with its partners continues in partnership with the church.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Thailand has congregations in Bangkok and in North-Eastern Thailand. There are plans to expand the work also to the other regions of the country. The Head Office as well as the offices of the Lutheran Diakonia Department, the Lutheran Mass Communication and the Lutheran Institute of Theological Education are located in Bangkok.

For the life of a new church at least six aspects are crucial:

1. Church planting and expansion

For a new church there is only one possibility, it must expand. This means that the church and its congregations must be reaching out to the non-Christian population. During the last years about a hundred people have been baptized annually, half of them outside Bangkok. In the beginning of this year the registered membership of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Thailand was 1 317. Compared to the growth of other churches in Thailand the growth has been steady and relatively fast.

2. Contextualized theology

It is necessary to develop contextualized forms of worship and theological work. A meaningful contextualization is not possible without proper tools, most important of them are the Bible and the confessional writings. The Bible was translated into Thai already during the last century. Thai has been a written language for more than 600 years. During the early years of the ministry of the Lutheran Mission in Thailand, a project to translate the confessional writings of the Lutheran Church was initiated. So far the Augsburg Confession and Luther's Catechisms have been translated. The Ecumenical Creeds had been translated already earlier.

3. Worship

The traditions of the other Protestant churches working in Thailand influence the worship life of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Thailand. In the Protestant churches in Thailand the worship life was first influenced by the

American Presbyterian tradition, and after the Second World War by the Pentecostal style of worship. This means that the liturgical forms are simple or they are understood to be free. In recent years there has been in some Protestant groups a growing interest in employing more of the Thai cultural forms, especially music for worship. Some of this process you witnessed during the opening worship of this conference.

4. Diakonia

The economy of Thailand has been developing very fast, but the development has not benefitted all citizens. The gap between the rich and the poor has not been narrowed. The challenges for the diakonia of the church are found either in the rural areas or among the poor in big cities. In Thailand, diakonia or Christian social work has mostly been carried out by independent organizations. Within the Evangelical Lutheran Church the role of the local congregations in diakonic work has been emphasized. The Diakonia Department is working closely together with the local congregations in order to enable them to take care of their members and to serve their surrounding communities. However, it is necessary to have some bigger institutions for tasks which the small local congregations are not able to take care of.

5. Constitution

Before the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Thailand was established, its constitution went through several drafts. Parts of it were also tried out. The drafting of the constitution took more than ten years. The purpose was not to adopt a constitution from already existing churches but to formulate a constitution which is relevant in the context of Thailand. Many seminars and discussions took place. The result is that there is a strong feeling of ownership of the constitution. The constitution is not something that has been brought in from somewhere else but it has been worked out together.

6. Theological training

The church needs theological training for its members and workers. Since most of the members are first-generation Christians there is a great need to build up functioning programs from the very basics of the Christian faith to the training for full-time ministry.

The Lutheran Institute of Theological Education (LITE) was established to serve this purpose. It has been built up gradually beginning from seminars for the missionaries and the first Thai evangelists, and discipleship courses for church members. Usually in Thailand, the training for full-time ministry and membership training have been carried out by separate institutions. The Lutheran Institute of Theological Education attempts to combine these two tasks in one institute. For the full-time ministry, the Diploma of Theology and the Bachelor of Theology programs have been formed. These have been accredited by the Asia Theological Association.

The LITE is organizationally part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Its full-time staff serves also in the local congregations, and national church workers and missionaries serve as part-time lecturers. The full-time students are mostly first-generation Christians who come from the local congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Thailand. It is possible to accept students also from the other churches. Part of the full-time students from the Institute are serving as stewards at this conference.

In developing the training programs it is necessary all the time to keep in mind the context where the church is living. The hope is that the programs help the church to gain strength, to grow and to expand. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Thailand is still a small church but it has a vision to reach out with the Gospel to its neighbors.

WORKING GROUPS

INTRODUCTIONS TO THE ISSUE

AND

GROUP REPORTS....

The main aim of the PAYC was to prepare the young people for their participation in the LWF Ninth Assembly. Five out of the ten Assembly Issues were discussed by the PAYC participants. In addition to that there was a working group dealing with the evaluation and planning of the LWF Youth program. In this section presentations given in the different working groups as well as the reports from these groups are included.



GROUP 1 - Commitment to Church Unity

INTRODUCTION

Lina Wanda SCHULTZ-WINKLER

The task of our group is to discuss commitment to church unity. In my introduction to this theme I would like to mention some key words and raise questions in order to facilitate our discussion.

First I would like us to focus on the results of ecumenism. Most of the time we think that we are not doing anything about ecumenism but talk and talk. In our discussion, we will first of all ask ourselves what we think ecumenism is. In John 17:20-21 you read that Jesus says: "I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me". Now I would like to ask you what is unity, what does unity mean here and what kind of unity do we want? For example, going together to the same church is that unity as Jesus understands it? And I ask you: is it the same to mingle as to join? If I understand those words correctly, mingle is when you put things together without knowing what ingredients are being used. Then you cannot separate them, they lose their identities. When you join something, you put things together but you still know who is who. The Assembly Study Book says: "The openness of our Christian faith to the future can encourage us to transcend that which is past, and, in confrontation with our doctrinal tradition and in a continuing dynamic interpretation of the biblical witness, to reformulate the truth of the gospel as it is to be proclaimed and lived in the present time." I ask you: is the ecumenical commitment in opposition to furthering Lutheran identity? Does being ecumenical means that we have to lose our identities as Lutherans in order to be ecumenical?

The second part of our discussions would be the process of ecumenism. There are steps that we have to follow and one of those steps is talking, yes talking, and sharing opinions, but is it just that? There are some results of our process, the documents that are produced by churches. Should they remain only documents, just papers? For example, I have here this document between the Roman Catholic Church and the LWF, but should it be just a paper? Or should we make them real, facts?

Thirdly we will discuss how we, as young people in the LWF member churches, can be involved in the ecumenical process? What kind of process do we think the LWF should carry on? How can we have a sense of ownership of the achievements of the ecumenical process? Because as they are our churches' achievements they are also our achievements. What can we do in order to make the documents real?

Let's start our discussion about what ecumenism is, what unity means. I would like you to share with the group some ecumenical experiences in your own churches, in your own local churches, what has been done in your churches in the ecumenical movement.

GROUP 1 - REPORT

1. Introduction

We started our discussion on church unity by focusing on ecumenism and what we mean by church unity. The questions we have to address are : What is ecumenism? What kind of unity do we want ? Could church unity exist together with diverse confessional identities? How can we participate in the achievements of unity and how can we make them real? We believe that unity in the Christian church was founded by Jesus Christ but, because of human weaknesses, it is no longer recognized. Ecumenism is the tool or concept through which we are trying to renew this invisible unity in Christ's church around the world.

2. Experiences

Through sharing our experiences, we identified common problems related to unity and ecumenism in our churches. During this discussion, some concerns were raised. The Asian region does not seem to have many difficulties in their ecumenical work. They have several arrangements together with different denominations, and have made positive experiences with this cooperation. However, they are still facing a big challenge as a community.

Differences among Lutheran churches are found in Africa, Latin America, Asia, and in Europe. In Africa several countries, for example South Africa, Namibia, Kenya, do have two or more Lutheran churches. The differences between Lutheran churches in one country is just as much a problem as the differences they have with other denominations.

We see quite a lot of ecumenical activities in the Nordic area and bigger centers and not much of this is visible at the grassroots level. We found out that the lack of unity and solidarity among these churches is because of ethnic and cultural differences, financial circumstances (financially dependent churches are in many instances divided by the funding mother churches), and theological diversities.

Despite these differences, some groups from different denominations do come together to deal with the problem and even engage in ecumenical worship. During such encounters, theoretical issues are put aside, and a feeling of unity is created through interaction . We saw this as an important practice that should be continued. However, the group felt that it is necessary to have a minimum awareness of one's own confessional identity when interacting with other denominations.

There are some documents drafted by church leaders concerning church unity and ecumenism. However, the group felt that the leaders fail to pass on this information and knowledge to their congregations efficiently, and to the youth in particular .

3. Objectives and Recommendations

In order to attain the highest level of church unity, the group would like to encourage the LWF Youth Desk to :

- pass on information about the outcome of the dialogues to the local level; e.g. through addressing ecumenical issues at youth gatherings and church services;
- prepare documents with information about the differences between the denominations, and the significance of the different sacraments so as to promote mutual understanding and acceptance;
- initiate, encourage and promote cooperation and dialogue between Lutheran congregations as well as between other denominations; e.g. by funding youth gatherings, exchange programs, international camps and meetings;
- encourage cooperation between the local churches, the missionary movements and missionaries at different levels, and promote ecumenical unity among themselves.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, we can say that much ecumenical work has been done in principle, but, in fact, a lot still has to be done. Many meetings have been going on for years. It is time to bring our decisions to life.

Our dream and vision is to perceive a time when every denomination comes to worship our Lord together, sharing one baptism, one communion, and accepting each other's ministries. It is therefore not only the responsibility of the LWF Youth Desk, but also ours, to make this dream come true.



GROUP 2 -

Churches as living Communities in Diverse Cultural Settings

INTRODUCTION

The text of the introduction was not received from the group resource person before the closing date of this publication.

GROUP 2 - REPORT

Churches exist in specific social, political, natural and cultural contexts. As Lutherans, we are called to witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ as we struggle to build churches and congregations that are visible signs of living and inclusive communities.

As member churches of the Lutheran World Federation, all of us come from rich and varied cultures and communities with different customs and traditions, celebrations and political concerns. Within the context of these specific communities, churches - through activities, outreach and worship - are expressions of their culture. How then is it possible to identify ourselves within the specifically defined family of Lutherans, while at the same time accurately reflecting the pulse of our respective cultures and societies? In this multicultural, wonderfully diverse world, we face many challenges in our efforts to be respectful and inclusive while also maintaining our individual cultural identities and traditions, which are God's gifts to God's people.

As Lutheran churches worldwide have struggled to become more culturally sensitive and hospitable, inclusive communities in the global village of our world, the Lutheran mission and witness has often been guilty of a lack of love and cultural ignorance. Even though by its Christian nature, Lutheranism is inherently inclusive of all people, regardless of race, color, gender, or economic circumstances, there still exists exclusion and cultural prejudice.

Churches can serve as safe places of learning through the experience of cross cultural reality in the following ways:

- By working to find safe places to talk together and communicate. Churches need to provide enough space for us to listen to each other and dialogue about issues of concern to us.
- By building relations with other churches through cross cultural gatherings.
- By worshipping together we are offered precious insight into a culture different from our own, equipping us to better understand one another and feel more united in the message of the Gospel.
- By educating our church members about different cultures from an early age, aiding efforts of inclusivity can show a Christian spirit of respect and love.
- As a communion of churches, the LWF can help churches become more inclusive, culture sensitive communities.
- By sharpening its function as a communion of churches called to worship together with diverse groups of people in different countries.
- By establishing solid networks among member churches and congregations to facilitate open communities and understanding between our brothers and sisters around the world.
- By continuing to support the international gatherings of Lutherans across the globe.
- By organizing visitation programs that help us learn about one another.
- By organizing training and leadership programs to deal effectively with issues of cultural sensitivity and what it means to be a truly inclusive and loving community.
- By encouraging ecumenical dialogue between Lutherans and other Christian denominations and congregations as well as with other non-Christian religions.
- In a world divided by discrimination, hate, hunger, war, poverty and death - the Lutheran communities are called to be safe, healing, culturally diverse, hospitable havens of life and Christian unity.

GROUP 3 -

Christian Witness in a World of Religious and Cultural Plurality

INTRODUCTION

Renata HINRICHS

I. Introduction

The topic for our working group is “Christian Witness in a World of Religious and Cultural Plurality”. Before I start my lecture I want you to know that I am not an expert on different religious systems and my experience of living among believers of different religions or cultures is rather limited. Although I lived in three different countries over the last ten years (Poland, the USA, the Czech Republic), I am sure some of you have more experiences and practical knowledge on the subject than I do. So I assume that my speech will be just an inspiration for discussion from which all of us can learn something new.

II. Different approaches to non-believers

I will use very often the term “non-believer” and I want to make clear what I mean by that. Basically when I talk about non-believers I refer to people who are not Christian, in other words this is a wide category which includes followers of all religions (except Christianity) and atheists.

There were two important notions introduced in our Assembly Study book in the chapter dealing with our issue. The first is “religious plurality” which refers to the presence of more than one religious orientation in society. The second issue is “pluralism” which is defined as “active engagement with plurality”.

I believe that the first issue is very easy to observe in every society and because of that it doesn’t need an extra explanation. I would like to draw our attention to the second notion - pluralism. When I was trying to put the definition (“active engagement with plurality”) into more practical terms, I came up with three different active approaches:

- 1) **Tolerance.** It takes some effort to tolerate different opinions or views so it could be seen as an active attitude. Unfortunately in practice it leads to indifference which is never recommended in our main resource - the Bible.
- 2) **Appreciation of other belief systems.** If we appreciate some other religion, we usually do it because of two reasons:
 - a) we want to learn something new from them;
 - b) we find things we have in common.

I personally see quite a few things we can learn, for example, from Buddhists. I think we should give them credit for their devotion to their religion which they are not ashamed of, rather they are proud of it. Their religion becomes their lifestyle. They simply live according to what they believe in. As a consequence of that they show a great zeal in proclaiming their faith and finding in that way new followers of their religion. We saw it happening in Eastern Europe in the last few years. I believe that many Christian churches lost that zeal of searching for the lost.

It is often said that we can find some middle line and cooperate with other religions serving humanity together for the common good of all in regard to questions of peace, justice, environment. Referring to our source (the Bible), I do not find anywhere a recommendation of cooperation or united undertakings. On the contrary, the Bible clearly states that we should not be yoked with non-believers (2 Corinthians 6:14-18).

Another problem which may occur is a different understanding of issues based on faith. For example, justice means something totally different to Muslims than to Christians.

- 3) **Love of non-believers as our neighbors.** This seems to be the most challenging approach out of the three. There is no doubt that this is a Bible-based recommendation. The question is, however, how to express that attitude of love. From everyday universal, cross cultural experience we know that if we love somebody we want to share with that person the most precious things we have. Do we as Christians have something more valuable to share than the good news of salvation?

I am strongly convinced that active engagement should be understood as an approach of love shown through witnessing about Jesus Christ. The question arises, however, HOW to witness effectively. We will try to find some ways of answering that question during our discussion here. We will meet three times in our group. Therefore, I have divided my lecture into three parts in which we will be dealing with the following issues:

1. Witness and religious freedom
2. Witness and dialogue
3. Pastoral and missiological concerns.

III. Witness and religious freedom

Looking at examples from the Bible, it is rather clear that religious freedom was not the necessary condition for successful witness. We see Daniel worshipping God while the whole country is bound to worship the king. His witness of faith brought fruit because all the people started to worship God. We see Paul being persecuted for proclaiming the WAY and yet thanks to his word of witness many people believed in Jesus. Finally we hear stories about Christianity spreading within the Roman Empire although it was forbidden and the price of witnessing was often very high.

I can also give examples of effective witness from times and places closer to us, from the Czech Republic where religious freedom was considerably limited for a long time. It was illegal to gather officially for religious purposes, yet the Word of God was preached at homes or in the woods and the number of believers grew thanks to the testimonies of Christians.

Just to give you some ideas about the reality of like back in those days, I will present to you some facts from the youth ministry in the Czech Republic. Youth played an important role in spreading the gospel. Although it often meant closing the door to a future professional career (very few who admitted that they were Christians could study at the university), young people still took an active part in mission work by organizing camps high in the mountains which were in reality Bible conferences. They had developed a system of weekend Bible courses which on the surface had to look like recreational activities. The whole youth work functioned as a club where young people were growing in faith, learning, playing and spending free time together. The outcome of that is very obvious. The church grew stronger and the non-believers were exposed to the Christian life style. It seems then that lack of freedom *enhances* the power of witness and the growth of the church.

Those times and more recent experiences have proven to me that religious freedom does not affect the result of witnessing. The key of a powerful witness is taking it on a more individual level. People are tired nowadays of empty words and fake promises. They want to see words in action. To make it short, our life should be a witness to those around us. We should then think about the context in which we meet the non-believers and how we can emphasize our faith there. We should remember, however, that the witness of deeds is not enough if it is not backed up by the word of testimony to which we are obliged by the Bible (1 Peter 3:15).

I do not think that there is any country nowadays which considers Christianity as the only religion, but we know that in the past there were examples when Christians deprived nations of religious freedom. That is why we should touch on that problem as well. It seems to be rather obvious from Jesus' teachings and the history of the nations that we cannot force anyone to become a Christian. The conclusion then is that we should guarantee religious freedom to others with the full understanding that it compels us as Christians to devoted mission work. In the situation of

a lack of religious freedom I believe that we as Christians should plead with the authorities for religious freedom, but using physical means (violence, war, open rebellion) for religious freedom is not faithful to Scripture nor a good testimony to others (see Romans 13:1).

IV. Witness and dialogue

Before we start talking about dialogue we should decide what the goal of witness is. Why do we witness? What do we want to achieve? I think it is easy to answer that question when we look at the motivation of people who were witnessing in the Bible. We witness to others about salvation so that God may be glorified by a larger number of people (those who received eternal life by grace through faith in Jesus).

Remembering that our goal is reaching others for Jesus we can ask the question if dialogue is possible or necessary or if it is useless.

I believe that in creating the atmosphere for dialogue we prepare the perfect ground for the realization of our goal. Dialogue can be used as a tool, as a means of mission work. It has to be an open conversation in which we as Christians need to be ready to ask questions and know how to answer questions which we can be asked. A beautiful model of this dialogue was set by Jesus when he was talking with the Samaritan woman by the well. It is clearly an example of cross cultural and cross religious witness. He is not pushy. He respects her culture but he also tells her the truth without hiding anything. He confronts her lifestyle. He confronts her faith. And he presents her with the truth. As a result of that encounter many people in her village believed in Jesus.

We ought to remember that the purpose of the dialogue with the non-believers is not just to find things in common or to serve humanity or to reach a state of peaceful coexistence, but our goal is evangelism: the witness about Jesus Christ. The motto for that task has been given by our Lord: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but by Me" (John 14:6). We know that Jesus is the only way and we are commended to go and proclaim the good news to others (Matt. 28:19). We are bound to confront people with the Scripture. We have to do this if we want to obey the great commission. Our intention is not to prove that somebody is wrong or to convince somebody by intellectual speculations but our responsibility is to let the Holy Spirit use the word of our witness in a powerful way for the glory of God. We find many examples from the Apostle Paul's life of how God used his hold witnessing for his glory.

Non-confrontative dialogue does not seem to be the solution to the world's conflicts because other religions stand strong in their beliefs and very often the only way for achieving understanding is by compromising our beliefs. Jesus never compromised God's Word. He never met anyone "in the middle." But instead he confronted them with the truth and gave them the opportunity to receive grace. If dialogue means compromising to achieve a peaceful coexistence with other religions, we lose track of our chief aim as Christians which is witness about the saving grace of God. What is the purpose of the dialogue then? Is it witness about the Lord or the search for common values and common ethical principles?

V. Pastoral and missiological concerns

The fact that we live in a world of many religions has implications for pastoral work. It seems that the Christian church is not well equipped for the task of cross cultural and cross religious witness. There are certain areas of our work within the church body which may need some changes if we want our witness to bear fruit. Let me give you some suggestions:

- 1) **Cross cultural/cross religious seminary training.** Among our seminaries, there should be included an obligatory course regarding different religions with a reference to their cultural background. That course should focus on equipping future pastors with the knowledge of *effective means of reaching people of different religious groups for Christ*. It is important to point at the elements of a certain culture which can be used as an illustration for the key elements of Christian doctrine (e.g. the plan of salvation). A number of cases like that have been described, for example by Don Richardson.

- 2) **Training lay people to participate actively in mission projects.** It is a necessity to involve lay people because in that way the range of witnessing is tremendously increased. Training should focus on how to relate to people from different religious backgrounds. It is very important to know how to witness to them with respect and with cultural sensitivity. Speaking from my own experience, I noticed that the attitude of love, care and readiness to help works as an icebreaker. For me, this has been an effective way to open the door for testimony.
- 3) **Christians ought to be reminded that the foundation of successful witness is prayer.** This is our weapon and it must not be neglected if we want to be used by God. Our words of witness are powerless unless equipped by the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. If we want the Holy Spirit at work God's people have to pray.
- 4) **Cooperation with other religions.** Cooperation can be another positive change in our churches if we are ready to help them whenever they are in need (e.g. pastoral care in prison, hospital calls, refugee camps, public schools, counseling for interfaith marriages). We can use all these situations as opportunities to witness about Jesus.
- 5) **Adjusting our church tradition for better witness.** We may want to check our church traditions too if we want to prepare ourselves for cross religious mission. Some traditions could probably be changed in order to witness more effectively to people who do not understand those man-made historical traditions (referring especially to the form of worship - liturgy, music, language). We have to remember that it can be a serious obstacle for the reception of God's message. As I have already said, the fact that we live in a multi religious world forces us to make some changes in the way we live and the words we use. Fortunately this situation is not quite new and for instructions we can turn to the Bible. Most Bible stories take place in a multi religious setting. We have examples of Joseph, Daniel, John, Paul, etc. Thorough studies of their methods of work and witnessing can undoubtedly be profitable.

All the points above refer to the practical side of life but we should also mention the changes which are needed in theoretical areas.

The emphasis in contemporary misallage is on promoting our self-understanding as Christians not so much "in contrast" but "in relation" to people of other religions. That approach is supposed to result in "joining hands with them in joint endeavors for the common good of our communities." My questions is, if we can really walk together hand in hand. Can we really promote the integrity of creation together? Can the creation which once broke the unity with God be integrated without reconciliation through Jesus? These are the questions I hope we will find an answer for during our discussion.

Before I close I would like to share with you a fragment of a controversial poem called "The Creed of Modern Mind":

We believe that everything is OK
as long as you don't hurt anyone,
to the best of your definition of hurt
and to the best of your knowledge.

WE believe that all religions are basically the same -
at least the one that we read was.
They all believe in love and goodness.
They only differ on matters of creation,
sin, heaven, hell, God and salvation.

We believe that each man must find the truth
that is right for him.
Reality will adapt accordingly.
The universe will readjust.

History will alter.
 We believe that there is no absolute truth
 except the truth
 that there is no absolute truth.

We believe in the rejection of creeds,
 and lowering of individual thought.
(excerpt from "Creed" by Steve Turner)

I hope we will find time to discuss what our creed of faith is.

Witness and Religious Freedom

1. How do you understand the definition of pluralism? How would you interpret "active engagement with plurality"? What kind of active approaches do you think are important?
2. Is there anything we can learn from other religions without compromising our creed of faith?
3. In what practical ways can we show our attitude of love to people of different religious orientations?
4. What is the relation between religious freedom and the efficiency of witness?
5. What stand should Christians take when they are limited in their Christian freedom?
6. What does and what should religious freedom mean in the daily life of people as individuals, and as minority or majority religious groups?
7. What is the living context within which we meet people of other faiths and within which our Christian witness finds space for expression?

Witness and Dialogue

1. What is our goal of witness in a multi religious and multi cultural society?
2. What is the purpose of dialogue between Christians and non-Christians?
3. Is Jesus Christ a problem in our relation to people of other faiths? In what way is he the solution?
4. "Through dialogue allowance for mutual witness is made" (Assembly Study Book, p. 67). Is it necessary for us Christians to be witnessed to by other religions?
5. What is the mission of God in which we are also called to participated beyond the boundaries of the church?
6. How can we create understanding and be a neighbor with people of other faiths?

Pastoral and Missiological Concerns

1. What is the role and responsibility of lay people in the church in a multi religious society?
2. How equipped are we in the Lutheran communion, at all levels, for participation in dialogue with people of other faiths in our particular contexts? For example, in terms of our theological perspectives on other faiths; the content and method of our theological education and training; dialogue at the level of daily life. How can we prepare ourselves for witnessing?

3. What are the changes in our churches which will make our congregation a more comfortable place for people from different religious and cultural backgrounds?
4. What steps should be taken to examine our language, prayers, hymnody, and worship forms to determine whether they are adequately sensitive to the genuine concerns of people of other faiths in our communities?
5. Can the Christian church learn and use ideas from other religious and non-religious groups? If yes, what are they?
6. Is it possible to present Christianity “in relation” to other religions instead of “in contrast” to other religions?



Some of the PAYC participants were confronted with the Buddhist way of worship

GROUP 3 - REPORT

When we talk about Christian witness, we understand it to be a Christian sharing the Gospel of Christ with others, in words and actions. The goal of witness is making disciples. Here comes the question: who is a disciple? A disciple can be defined as a person who is justified by faith in Jesus Christ.

Witness may be understood as the word "mission". "Mission" however, may have a negative connotation to many people. The history of mission is so closely connected to colonialism. A substitute for the term is then needed. Therefore, we suggest that the word "witness" could be used.

Jesus Christ did not only tell us to witness about him, he commanded us to do so and equipped us with the Holy Spirit for that task (Acts 1:8). Some people think that the command to witness interferes with religious freedom. This can be true if it implies the use of force. We can talk about religious freedom from two perspectives: political and personal. We see the former when the state limits the freedom of religion, for example in Iran. Personal freedom, on the other hand, is the common idea that the individual has the right to have his or her own faith and conviction, referring to everyday relationships.

We do not see Christian witness as a threat to religious freedom. The proclamation of the Gospel does not limit an individual freedom of choice, when it is done within the atmosphere of love. This was evident in the ministry of Christ who used the form of dialogue for witnessing; he always respected freedom of decision. Dialogue is essential in this context.

Dialogue is necessary for witnessing in a world of religious and cultural plurality. In a Christian sense, dialogue is a process of interactions which promote understanding and learning, building relationships and providing opportunity for witness.

Dialogue in this sense should be centered on Jesus Christ and be a combination of tolerance, appreciation and love.

- * **tolerance:** the respect for the rights of other people as a passive approach
- * **appreciation:** active recognition that we can learn from others without compromising our Christian values
- * **love:** embracing all people as created by God. Without love dialogue is impossible

We have come to the understanding that culture and religion cannot be completely separated or isolated from each other. Witness should have a place in a particular cultural context. Dialogue then must occur in the context of the culture.

Challenges of a pastoral and missiological nature can be defined more specifically if we learn more about other religions. In that way we can find more effective ways of witnessing. Then we can avoid the danger of imposing our own culture on them, referring to what was said earlier about mission. We believe that some elements of western culture are too dominant in the Lutheran church. For example, the Lutheran form of worship may be an obstacle in reaching individuals of other cultures and faiths. Originally it was designed for homogeneous societies and as such it does not fit completely in a modern pluralistic world.

In this brief report we have tried to discover the narrow path between extreme approaches towards Christian witness. Nevertheless, as Christians we shall in all places proclaim that the fulfillment of God's plan comes in Jesus Christ, as our Lord and Savior:

"And I tell you, everyone who acknowledge me before others, the Son of Man will also acknowledge before the angels of God; but whoever denies me before others will be denied before the angels of God." (Luke 12: 8-9)

Out of this discussion we came to the following preliminary recommendations:

- * For member churches to provide a strong Christian education to get people grounded in Christian beliefs before entering dialogue;

- * For the LWF and member churches to support cross cultural programs for youth;
- * For the LWF to organize opportunities for dialogue both within the Christian religion as well as with other faiths;
- * For this dialogue to be sensitive to regional concerns;
- * For seminaries to include study of other faiths as an important part of theological education.



David Udo from the Lutheran Church of Nigeria presenting a gift to Bishop Sompong Hanpradit of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Thailand

GROUP 4 - VALUES, POWER and THE INFORMATION SOCIETY

INTRODUCTION

Valerie HOGUE

“Standing in the middle of a river looking upstream one can see the past. Standing in the middle of the river gazing downstream, one sees the future. But it is always the same river”. W. Warren Wagner

As we prepare to enter a new millennium, many issues concerning the future and the implications it will have on our current society are being raised. Issues concerning the human person, human society, human rights, the common good of society, and the law are points that must be pondered if we are justly and successfully to move into the next century. As Adam and Eve left the Garden of Eden, they must have said to one another, “We are now in a period of profound change.” So as it was in the beginning, and so many times in history past, it is today. Today we are repeating what Adam and Eve must have said. The only difference this time is that, rather than evolving over a long period of time, we are evolving in a space of only weeks to a few months.

The areas of information technology and communication are not new; they have been around since the beginning of time. Since the time that more than one language existed, it has been necessary for humans to find new ways of communicating that would close the barriers created by multiple languages. Likewise, we are challenged not only to improve existing forms of communication but to also be sensitive to our choice of communication methods. With emerging technological advancements and with the greater demand by society for more information, it is vital that we are aware of the importance of new forms of communication and the multiple means of providing information to the global audience.

Along with an increased yearning for more information, there are many serious ethical and moral issues that must be examined. Some of these issues are that of data proprietorship, data security, data surveillance, and the misuse and abuse of information. This has become an even greater concern for those who use the Internet as an increasing form of communication. As millions of people use the Internet, in particular the World Wide Web, it is important to constantly examine and discuss the moral and ethical implications of these new resources. The issue of data proprietorship is of concern since not all countries acknowledge that work done by individuals is automatically covered by copyright laws. There is also concern that information provided on the World Wide Web is not always accurate or reliable. This has become even more worrisome as more people and companies maintain homepages and more individuals are using these pages as the basis of information for their academic research and work. There is also an increasing concern to the amount of pornography on the World Wide Web. The Web is becoming more and more a means of business and the pornographic industry has taken advantage of the ability to widen its clientele. The concern is for countries that have very stringent rules regarding pornographic material. More importantly, there is serious concern that children are able to access such material. Children as young as three are “surfing” the Web and can easily obtain material to which they simply should not have access. There are several software companies that have responded to this dilemma by creating software applications that can block such sites and information from being viewed. However, this raises the issue of Web ownership. Are the software companies the owners of the Internet and the World Wide Web since they are the ones who dictate and control which software applications are necessary to retrieve or block information on the Web? Or are the owners the various world-wide governments as many of them are responsible for regulating and financing telephone companies, technological manufacturers, and information providers?

It cannot be understated that computers have revolutionized the work place. Computers have made information collection and retrieval much more simplified and expedient. There are many advantages to storing information in data bases on computers since it enables more individuals to have access to the information and thus saves on the resources necessary to research needed material. There is a greater enablement of information sharing. However, it is important to also realize that this is not without concerns as information that is often personal and confidential such as bank accounts, credit card numbers, medical records, and personal data, can be used in a negative way against individuals without their knowledge that such information abuse is taking place. One example of abuse of such information is agencies that pay companies to provide them with lists of their clients and specific

information such as name, address, phone number, date of birth, and occupation. The reality is that personal information is no longer personal or confidential.

This past March, UNESCO held its first International Congress on Ethical, Legal and Societal Aspects of Digital Information in Monte Carlo. Some of the most striking points which necessitate further discussion include the concept of mediacy which "describes the knowledge and skills to communicate and to navigate on the information highway, including abilities to explore information, space, discover, learn, find, manage, organize, evaluate, create, use, and preserve information". This concept is not restricted to the World Wide Web but also includes print, radio and television. Additionally, it implies that everyone should be an active participant in the exchange of information. Another point is that the exchange of information cannot be solely a North to South, West to East input - it must be two-way, and thus input from South to North and East to West must be taken seriously. As it currently stands, the dominant languages on the World Wide Web are English and German. This reflects the economic dominance that North America and Germany have.

Finally, UNESCO is in the process of drafting a global statement on info-ethics and is very much interested in input from external organizations. It has been suggested that our working group - along with Issue Group 7 in Hong Kong - could at least contribute and lay the groundwork for such input from the LWF. Additionally, our group has been asked to make suggestions and decide what we would like to see on the LWF youth homepage. We have the ability to see our visions taken seriously and acted upon almost immediately. Unlike the other working group, we will be able to see the fruits of our labors even before the next Assembly in seven years.



GROUP 4 - REPORT

Question 1: We have seen, over the past few days, how English is the predominant language of the LWF. This leaves out some people with limited knowledge from fully participating in discussions unless there is a willingness to facilitate communication. How can we empower people to participate more fully in the communion and share their gifts, knowledge, and stories - to communicate?

We have several recommendations for the LWF to facilitate communication during international conferences, both in the short and in the long term.

In the short term, we feel that the priority in using financial resources should be to facilitate communication between conference participants, through increased translation. For example, we feel that communication is a greater concern than accommodation or comfort. We must also create more time within the conference in order to allow people to speak in their own language and feel comfortable participating.

In the long term, we suggest that LWF member churches should encourage and support members of their communities to learn a second language. We feel this would promote several things. First, it would deepen our cultural awareness and facilitate the establishment of relationships between conference participants. Second, it would lessen the need for interpretation services at the conferences.

We also feel that in the long term the use of the Internet will encourage the relationships between member churches to develop, in turn increasing the use of multiple languages.

Question 2: We are called to be witnesses in our communities. What type of media is both necessary and acceptable to assist us in being effective witnesses of the Christian message?

It is important that the LWF Secretariat ensures that member churches have access to information.

We must be professional and people oriented in our use of the media. We feel that the media can be a very effective tool, but that this can never replace the person-to-person contact which spreads the Christian message. When using media, the technological advancement of the region must be taken into account. The highest priority for forms of media used within each region should be those which reach the most people. Some possibilities for appropriate media include radio, TV, newspapers, magazines and the Internet.

Question 3: Since the LWF has defined itself as being a communion of churches, how are the media being used to promote communication among the member churches and the LWF Secretariat?

Currently the LWF regularly sends many publications to member churches, such as literature on women, youth, education and development. Our group had a lengthy discussion concerning the use of the Internet. It is a reality that many member churches don't have the resources to obtain access to Internet. The main goal is to promote mediacy. However we still feel that the Internet could be used on a global scale to provide information about all member churches to areas of the world which do have access. We hope that this information may create more opportunities to hear the critical voice of those who do not have access - concerning decision-making on how technology is used for communication - and allow for relationships to develop between member churches.

We recommend that every member church should be given the opportunity to have a homepage on the World Wide Web (WWW). This effort could be coordinated with the LWF Secretariat, with the LWF homepage serving as a starting point. All member churches could receive an invitation to take part in the project. If a member church does not have access to the Internet, they could send a fax with information about their church to the LWF office to be placed on the Net. Member churches who already have a homepage would be asked to send in a link to the LWF Secretariat and would be asked to take financial responsibility for their own homepage.

The goal of this project is to strengthen the links between the LWF member churches. We realize that this will create additional staffing needs in the LWF publications office. We discussed the possibility of an intern, as we feel a full-time staff person would not be necessary or feasible.

We look to LWF using the Internet as a communication tool. The natural place for this project to be carried out therefore is the communication service.

Question 4: Many of the churches are struggling, especially in Europe and North America, to keep youth active, vibrant and visible in the church. How do we utilize the various forms of media and communication to meet the youth where they are - with their particular histories, language, skills and disabilities?

To respond to the lack of opportunities for participation of youth in the church we need to use media in an interactive way which attracts youth. We feel that there is an important difference between reaching youth and actually bringing them into the church. The primary task of the church is to reach out to youth. When youth are reached, then they will come into the church of their own accord. The presence of youth who voluntarily join the church will draw other youth into the church with them. We must give youth opportunities to express their creativity and allow them to feel useful and important. Youth will come to the church when we encourage and allow them to be vital and essential participants in the church.

We must provide youth with the chance to use and develop their talent and skills: e.g. creating homepages, leaflets, magazines, music, art and symbols. This will help them to express their own faith within the setting of the gospel. Youth can also fulfill many roles within the church, some of which are currently done by people who are being paid. These initiatives should be implemented for all youth from a very early age, not only young adulthood.

The use of secular media from a Christian perspective should also be considered as a useful method for working with youth and their issues. We need to be deliberate in developing the identity of the church as a community center.

Question 5: If you are familiar with the World Wide Web (WWW) you may have noticed how much information is available on various topics. Unfortunately, one topic that still seems to be “lacking” in terms of volume and credible information is information on Christianity. How must the church equip itself to “compete in the information marketplace” and place Christian values and perspectives on the agenda?

It is important as we enter the media that the church is a bold force, communicating Christian values without shame. In order for the church to create a ministry of advocacy and be an alternative within the current media, youth themselves must play a large role in getting information on the WWW. It may be a role for which the youth have special gifts, since many of them are highly aware of the modern technologies.

Some of these gifts may be funneled towards helping develop the LWF homepage. In terms of the content of the youth section of the homepage our group came up with a number of suggestions. We suggested that the following should be included:

- a photo gallery of people and events
- addresses of people who want to become pen pals, e-mail pals etc.
- globally accessible youth events - present and future
- practical leadership development resources
- links to other member countries homepages as well as to other relevant information and resources
- history of what LWF and specifically the Youth Desk have done
- current information about the activities of the Youth Desk
- updates on human rights and justice issues and concerns
- tutorials on Luther's Small Catechism
- PAYC's final document - interactive for people to post comments to.

Generally we suggest that the initial pages be kept very simple (without too many graphics) so as to not take too long to download, but still to be appealing and include specific information about the possible links that are available.

Finally we feel that it should be an interactive service, where people have access to write and express their thoughts and concerns and critical voice with regard to youth and wider issues in their own contexts.

Question 6: The evolution of media has had a blossoming impact on the way we live - in particular to everyday business and commercial interests. How does the church help its people learn to “read” the media critically to discover the messages of value?

We must be deliberate about making the church a place where dialogue concerning community issues can and should take place. It is imperative that we use Christ as our critical voice for discerning what we hear. Bible studies can be used as a tool for developing this critical voice. Church leaders need to encourage their members to actively integrate Christian faith into everyday life, thus equipping them to partake in the ongoing struggle for discernment. We as a church body must also play a role, through stepping forward and analyzing the slanted messages we receive daily from the media. Our response to these messages must not only be one of realization but action. In all these efforts, the Bible must play a vital role, serving as our foundation for discussion and action. We must continue our prayer life for our communities well-being.

Question 7: Though it is the journalist’s good intentions to ensure that an accurate narration/observation of a story/situation is reported, there will continuously remain an “overseer” who has the power to either accept or reject what the journalist has said and even re-word a story so that the story/paper/magazine can sell greater volumes and thus increase revenue. In some countries the journalists are silenced and cannot speak out for fear of persecution. How do we change things so that the commercial voices are no longer the loudest and in return empower people to regain their voices with dignity?

There is an important distinction between freedom limited by regional government and that freedom limited by the dominating voice of media powers. Different contextual circumstances should determine our response. We must continue to pray for those who are silenced by political, religious and other groups within their own country. Internet may be a valuable tool for the expression of people who have no other freedom within the media.

Local efforts of intervention may be the most effective means of standing up to the powerful media. We must work in ways that are diplomatic to achieve equity. Observing the realities of society through our own eyes, not only through the printed words will help us to discern reality from media bias. We must be conscious about reading between the lines and being reflective readers. Continuing our efforts to work directly with the poor and powerless helps us to be aware of the voices that are missing.

GROUP 5 - Witness Through Service: the Christian Response to a Suffering World

INTRODUCTION

Tero RANTANEN

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Jesus Christ, each one of you will soon be given a card which is facing upside down. My sincere wish is that you wouldn't turn those cards until I ask you to do so. This brief presentation gives me a great opportunity to share with you a very significant text, which was written by Thomas a Kempis. In order to take full advantage of the text, especially in case you are familiar with it, I ask you to sit back, close your eyes, take a deep breath, relax and concentrate on what you will soon hear:

Jesus has many who love His Kingdom in Heaven, but few who bear His cross.
He has many who desire comfort, but few who desire suffering.
He finds many to share His feast, but few His fasting.
All desire to rejoice with Him, but few are willing to suffer for His sake...

Had there been a better way, more profitable to the salvation of (human)kind
the Christ would have revealed it in His word and life.
But He clearly urges, both His own disciples and all who wish to follow Him,
to carry the cross, saying, "if any will come after me, let him (or her) deny himself
(or herself) and take up the cross and follow me."

Dear friends, we do know that the Christian response to a suffering world exists, but the question is, where to find a source of courage for manifesting it in our everyday lives? Please, now turn those cards I gave you. Cross: taking it, is our calling - in it, is our source of courage for bearing it. This is exactly what it is to be in Christ - called to witness. The Apostle Paul writes: "But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong" (1 Corinthians 1:23, NRSV). However, isn't it too often so that even if we might be eager to proclaim this foolish message about the cross in many words, we find ourselves not being so eager any more when it comes to witness it through service? As Jesus said, even though in another context than ours: "Do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words" (Matthew 6:7, NRSV). The so-called holistic understanding of mission, which emphasizes indivisibility of word and deed, aims to take into full account our God-given humanity as indivisible compositions of body, mind and soul. Especially in secularized societies, words fall far short from being taken seriously, if there are no very concrete actions to support them.

Even if they accept the holistic understanding of mission in principle, many churches seem to ignore what its realization requires in practice. A church without devoted members is like "salt which has lost its taste." In order to "restore their saltiness", many churches, especially in the so-called West, should immediately start paying adequate attention to challenging their passive members to become living arms and feet of the body of Christ. Since nothing can grow without roots, churches should considerably increase their efforts to support grassroots activities which aim at encouraging especially young people to take further steps on their way to deeper commitment in self-giving love and solidarity.

SEE-JUDGE-ACT

Phase One: SEE (Facts)

- * What is the situation like (written reports from various sources and personal testimonies)
 - in our neighborhood;
 - in our churches;
 - in our societies;
 - on our continents;
 - in our world?

Phase Two: JUDGE (values)

* What does the situation look like as seen from the viewpoint of

- national laws;
- international law;
- Christian faith?

Phase Three: ACT (words and deeds)

* What to do:

- in our neighborhood;
- in our churches;
- in our societies;
- on our continents;
- in our world?

THE PRAYER OF ST. FRANCIS

“Lord, make me instrument of your peace where there is hatred. Let me show love;
where there is division, unity;
where there is error, truth;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.

O divine master, let me not seek so much to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as love for it is in giving that we receive; in pardoning that we are pardoned; in dying that we are born to eternal life.
Amen.



Buddhist temple in Bangkok

GROUP 5 - REPORT

Talking about a suffering world we feel insecurity and fright but also hope and confidence and the willingness to act and to develop visions. It is important to us to stress that there are neither historical nor cultural nor economical reasons to justify injuries to human dignity. As young Christians we believe it to be our responsibility to gather the facts, to call them by their names and to engage ourselves.

We must have the courage to ask ourselves where changes are needed. Among the concerns about peace, justice and the integrity of creation the working group felt strongly challenged by:

- violations of rights of future generations to their inheritance
- consumerism, individualism, egoism
- globalization of markets, information, traveling
- genocide
- enemy images, friend-foe schemes
- militarism and antipersonnel land mines
- genetic technology (bioethics)
- animal rights
- human rights violations in churches
- violation of rights of refugees, migrants, ethnic and language minorities, indigenous peoples
- violations of the rights of the child
- violation of rights of women

Since the time factor did not allow the group to deal with all the relevant issues concerning the suffering world, we decided to focus our attention and to concentrate on the violation of the rights of the child (1.) and the violation of the rights of women (2.).

The working group recalls previous LWF documentation on human rights, peace and justice, paying special attention to the following two statements adopted by the Budapest Assembly in 1984.

"We come out of this Assembly with the firm conviction that peace is the will of God for the whole creation. War is not according to the will of God. There can be no lasting peace as long as people starve, injustices prevail, or people are oppressed, persecuted or discriminated against because of their faith, view of life, race, sex, or ethnic origin. Social and economic injustice as well as ideological conflicts are at the root of many of the wars of liberation. There is no peace without justice, and no justice without peace. To accept the prevailing unjust situation in many parts of the world, particularly in the so-called Third World, is a denial of peace."

[the Seventh Assembly of LWF, Statement on peace and justice]

"Nevertheless, human rights are an indispensable basis for a just and participatory society. Peace cannot be without justice; justice cannot be realized except in peace. Human rights are indivisible. The basic human rights, including self-determination and the right to live in peace and with individual integrity, cannot be implemented unless social conditions and political structures are justly ordered."

[the Seventh Assembly of LWF, the Statement on Human Rights]

The Working Group notices that a church without devoted members is like "salt which has lost its taste". In order to "restore their saltiness", many churches, especially in the so-called developed countries, should immediately start paying adequate attention to challenging their passive members to become living arms and feet of the body of Christ. Since nothing can grow without roots, churches should considerably increase their efforts to support grassroots activities, which aim to encourage especially young people to take further steps on their way to deeper commitment in self-giving love and solidarity.

I. Violation of the rights of the child

Jesus Christ told his disciples not to hinder the little children and said: "Let the little children come to me and do not stop them, for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs." [Luke 18:16, NRSV]

The Working Group reminds that "[t]he way a society treats children reflects not only its quality of compassion and protective caring, but also its sense of justice, its commitment to the future, and its urge to enhance the human condition for coming generations."

[Javier Perez de Cuellar, former UN Secretary General]

Not only the Kingdom of God but the whole universe belongs to the children, because they are the future inheritors of this world. However, the rights of the child are gravely violated throughout the world. Therefore the Working Group identifies the need for the LWF Secretariat and LWF member churches to pressure their respective governments to fully implement the International Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The working group recognized areas in which empowerment for children is needed:

- right to voice and meaningful participation in home, society and church;
- rights of street children;
- nutritional status of children;
- gender equity among children;
- sexual violence against children;
- corporal punishment in schools;
- expulsion of pregnant school girls;
- female genital mutilation;
- teenage pregnancy.

Many of these seem region-related to the so-called Third World but in fact problems of the rights of the child occur elsewhere as well. All of them must be a concern of the whole Lutheran community. The dissolution of the family as an institution will inevitably jeopardize the rights of the child to be cared for and given attention.

As the PAYC is taking place in Bangkok, where sex industry is part of reality, the working group emphasizes the urgent need to address the problems of children being forced into sex, international child trafficking and other related dehumanizing activities, and reiterates for this topic the following needs:

LWF Secretariat and LWF member churches should:

- 1) campaign at all levels for the rights of the child, especially paying attention to the evils of the sex industry. To that end, the LWF Youth Desk should create a network enabling the sharing of adequate information about exploitation of children in the sex industry. This network should involve also WCC, NGOs and governments;
- 2) pressure their respective governments to the full implementation of the Declaration and Agenda for Action, adopted by the World Congress Against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children;
- 3) encourage special moral, religious and prayerful support to the victims of sexual violence.
- 4) address at the grassroots level the inhuman experiences children are facing as pawns of the sex industry;
- 5) pay special attention to factors giving rise to the sex industry, e.g. poverty and certain cultural factors;
- 6) voice their concerns about pornography -- especially on the Internet and/or the World Wide Web-- violating the rights of the child.

II. The violation of women's rights

The second issue discussed concerned the situation of women and girls and prevailing gender-perception in society.

Time didn't allow an extensive debate so that the working group raised the following matters as starting-points:

- gender inequality in homes, churches and society;
- inhuman treatment, e.g., sexual harassment, rape, beating, genital mutilation;
- participation in the democratic process;
- inheritance and owning property;
- education, dignity and equal wages;
- respect for opinions and feelings of women;
- medical care and adequate maternity leave;
- marital problems and arranged marriages.

It is typical, even characteristic, that many human cultures don't provide for equal partnership of both men and women. Even though Christianity has to be contextual in order to be relevant for people living in diverse cultural settings, it also has a transformative aspect in relation to culture. Therefore, to be culturally sensitive does not justify denying the universal aspect of human rights, equal to both men and women.

The working group reiterates as a first step the following needs:

LWF Secretariat and LWF member churches should:

- 1) encourage the LWF Youth Desk to develop a theological approach towards the question of women's rights in a way that does not exclude non-theologians;
- 2) educate children to respect their mothers, sisters, elderly women and women in general, in order to eradicate inequality in the future;
- 3) urge pastors to combine traditional marriage counseling concepts with gender sensitive approaches aiming at an equal relationship between women and men.

GROUP 6 - Evaluation of the LWF Youth Program

REPORT

The group concentrated on three areas:

- I. Experiences by Youth Council members.
- II. Evaluation of the Youth Program.
- III. Recommendations and suggestions for the future.

I. Experiences by Council members representing youth

- a. The group felt it was an honor to be elected as Council members with full voice and vote.
- b. The LWF Council was encouraging and supportive of our participation.
- c. The past seven years provided us with knowledge, spiritual growth, leadership skill and many more opportunities.
- d. Our expectations were unrealistic in many aspects:
 1. As Council members we represented the youth of our region/subregion. We found out that the way in which we could represent our respective region/subregion was by bringing the perspective of young people from a certain area of the world into the issues discussed in the Council.
 2. Except for the regional youth conferences and consultations, there were limitations in terms of communication with the youth of our region.
 3. Most of us were the only voice of our churches in the Council, but, nevertheless, we experienced difficulties in attaining recognition by our respective member churches. In the light of this we urge member churches and regions to make use of the experience of youth Council members by
 - calling on them to interpret and continue the work of the LWF;
 - including representatives in LWF-related activities in the region;
 - strengthening national and regional youth networks to facilitate exchange of information and cooperation.
 4. We wish the next youth representatives an experience as good as ours and look forward to further opportunities to serve the LWF and our churches.

II. Evaluation of the youth program

The group reviewed the activities of the youth desk for 1990-1997 and recognized the efforts made by the office to interpret the 1990 PAYC recommendations. Concerns were raised with regards to long-range planning, North-South balance and program implementation. The group supported the continuation of the exchange and internship programs.

III. Future program

The group suggested to the LWF as well as to the Youth Desk:

- a. to evaluate concerns with regard to staff overload and urge the setting of priorities appropriate to staffing;
- b. that the Youth Desk should play a role in youth orientation to the LWF Council in the initial years of their service, while youth Council members are to serve in an advisory function as consultants to the Youth Desk to represent regional concerns and to provide input between Assemblies;
- c. that the quota system that applies to Assembly delegations and the LWF Council also apply to the Executive Committee;
- d. that notice be taken to the difficulty in building and maintaining regional youth networks partly due to the constant turnover in national church youth leadership;
- e. that energy be turned from publishing Youth Directory to developing new forms of connecting youth, including the Internet and the World Wide Web;

- f. to affirm the value of youth leadership training at the Pre-Council meetings and urge the Youth Desk and national churches to assist and encourage youth to exercise these skills at home;
- g. that an evaluation of the 1997 PAYC be held in early 1998.



Drafting Committee working on the final message of the PAYC

MESSAGE

OF THE LWF PRE-ASSEMBLY YOUTH CONFERENCE (PAYC)

BANGKOK, THAILAND, 1997

1. We, the Lutheran youth, gathered in Bangkok, Thailand, at the 1997 PAYC have been given the theme “Be Not Ashamed: Christ Has Set Us Free.” This meeting in Asia is important because it gathers together youth from all corners of the world. We are also a part of the celebration of the LWF’s 50th Anniversary. We appreciate the feeling of being a natural and necessary part of this celebration. To do some reflection at this time in both directions seems appropriate. As we look back to the years behind us, we acknowledge that efforts have been made to include youth, which started in Hanover in 1952, and resulted in increased participation of youth at the Eighth LWF Assembly in Curitiba 1990, when seven delegates representing youth as full members of the LWF Council were elected. At this meeting in Bangkok we prepared a presentation for the Hong Kong Assembly entitled “LWF: 2000 and Beyond”.
2. We realize the close relationship of this conference’s theme with the 1990 PAYC theme in Buenos Aires “Do Not Say: I Am Too Young - I Send You.” As children of God, we are called to freedom as witnesses to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Through Bible studies dealing with different aspects of time we reflected upon this theme. We further explored the meaning of this theme within our working groups. With prayer and songs we accompanied the handover ceremony of Hong Kong to China.
3. “Be Not Ashamed: Christ Has Set Us Free.” This is meant to be a liberating message from Christ. Unfortunately, in the reality of our broken world, it is extremely difficult to reflect this message of hope in our daily experience. We face the harsh realities of drug addiction, political corruption, child labor, HIV/AIDS, the growing gap between the rich and the poor, the environmental crisis, a rise in militarism, discrimination, consumerism and materialism, urban violence, human rights violations and social injustices worldwide. In the light of this bleak global situation, it is not a surprise that youth today feel a great sense of disillusionment and indifference. Youth feel powerless and unable to engage in active struggle for change. However, the words “Christ Has Set Us Free” give us hope for the future. Christ has set us free to live in this world and shape it into a more promising future. To do so, we must use the skills acquired in our work with the LWF. Christ has set us free to build inclusive, loving communities.
4. We greatly appreciated the presentations given by invited guests from different perspectives relating to the theme of the conference. We found a common theme among these presentations; namely, an emphasis on the need not only to be a witness in our congregations, but also to be an active participant in our societies. We find this important because isolating ourselves in our respective congregations is unrealistic and contrary to the example of Christ. God calls us to be agents of change in the world, as those who have been freed by Christ from the bondage of the world. We also listened to an informative lecture from a professor of Buddhism who addressed the similarities and differences between Buddhism and Christianity. We appreciated this opportunity to engage in structured, respectful interfaith dialogue. There was an enthusiastic response and lively discussion following this presentation. We believe this kind of dialogue is essential to peaceful coexistence and open attitudes among different faiths.
5. We hope that through the experiences offered by the LWF structures, for example, the Young Women’s Leadership Development Program and the Youth Internship, youth will be encouraged to utilize their leadership skills within society as well as within local churches. Advocacy for social justice and change is challenging in light of the pressing problems of the world. We believe that only truthful witness is relevant witness to the world.
6. Reflecting on the theme of the PAYC, on the presentations and on five of the ten LWF Assembly Issues, participants came to the following conclusions:

Commitment to church unity

7. In order to attain the highest level of church unity, we encourage the LWF Office for Ecumenical Affairs to:
 - pass on the information pertaining to the outcome of the dialogues to the local levels; e.g. through addressing ecumenical issues at youth gatherings and church services;
 - prepare documents with information about the differences between the denominations and the significance of the sacraments so as to promote mutual understanding and acceptance;
 - initiate, encourage and promote cooperation and dialogue between Lutheran congregations as well as between other denominations, e.g. by funding youth gatherings, exchange programs, international camps and meetings;
 - encourage cooperation between the local churches, the missionary movements and missionaries at different levels, and promote ecumenical unity among themselves.



Chairing plenary during discussion on PAYC message

Churches as living communities in diverse cultural settings

8. Churches can serve as safe places. This means a place of openness where we can learn through the experience of crosscultural reality and also a critique of our own culture using Christian criteria as a parallel by:
 - building relations with other churches through intercultural gatherings, worshiping together, sharing information and education about diverse cultures;
 - organizing training and leadership programs, visitation programs and continuing to support international gatherings;
 - developing contextual theology in different regions of the world and giving financial support to all programs.

Christian witness in a world of religious and cultural plurality

9. Dialogue is necessary for witnessing in a world of religious and cultural plurality in a Christian sense. Dialogue is a process of interaction which promotes understanding and learning, builds relationships and provides opportunities for witnessing to Christ's mission. The dialogue should be centered at Jesus and be a combination of tolerance, appreciation and love.

10. We think that the dominant Lutheran form of worship, which is traditionally western, is old-fashioned and does not really suit contemporary youth of all cultures.
11. In view of this, we recommend:
 - that member churches educate their members to be firmly rooted in the Christian faith and then enter into dialogue;
 - that the LWF member churches support crosscultural programs for youth;
 - the organization of opportunities for dialogue within the Christian community as well as with other faiths and sensitivity to regional concerns;
 - the encouragement of Christians in all places, to proclaim that the fulfillment of God's plan comes in Jesus as our Lord and Savior; and
 - that the churches be encouraged to develop more contemporary forms of worship which are all sensitive to regional cultures, where people of various ages actively participate.

Values, power and the information society

12. It is important that the LWF Secretariat ensures that member churches have access to information. We feel that face-to-face Christian communication should never be replaced by the use of media. When using media, the technological advancement of the region must be taken into account. Priority should be given to the forms of media which reach the people within each region most.
13. We feel that among other media, the Internet has a purpose to serve within our church -- to facilitate dialogue and also act as a means of witness to the world. We recommend that every member church should be given the opportunity to have a homepage on the World Wide Web. We feel this will help communication between the LWF member churches. We believe the youth could be encouraged to help create and run these home pages allowing them to feel essential within the church.
14. While discussing communication, we looked at the problems created by language barriers. We would like the LWF member churches to encourage its members to learn a second language -- namely one or more of the four official conference languages. We believe this will strengthen links between the member churches.
15. We must continue to pray for those who are silenced by political, religious or other groups within their own country. Local efforts of intervention may be the most effective means of standing up to the powerful media. We must work in ways which are diplomatic to achieve equity. Observing the realities through our own eyes, not only through printed words, will help us to discern reality from media bias. The church must also play a role in stepping forward and analyzing the messages we receive from the media.

Witness through service - the Christian witness to a suffering world

16. In talking about a suffering world we feel insecurity and fear but we are also hopeful and confident about the willingness to act and to develop visions. We feel it is important to stress that there are no historical, cultural, or economic reasons to justify injuries to human dignity. Working with this issue we focused our attention on the violation of the rights of the child and of women.
17. We therefore reiterate the following needs:
The LWF Secretariat and LWF member churches should:
 - campaign at all levels for the rights of the child, especially paying attention to the sex industry and all forms of exploitation of children. To that end, the LWF Youth Desk should create a network to enable the sharing of adequate information regarding the exploitation of children. This network should also involve the WCC, NGOs, and governments;
 - pressure the respective governments to fully implement the Declaration and the Agenda for Action adopted by the World Congress Against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children;
 - encourage special moral, religious, and prayerful support to the victims of sexual violence;
 - voice their concerns about pornography and the violation of the rights of the child, especially on the Internet.

18. The second issue dealt with the situation of women and girls. Due to the prevailing perceptions surrounding gender in society, equal partnership of men and women is not yet possible.
19. We therefore recommend as a first step the following needs:
 - encourage the LWF Youth Desk to develop a theological approach related to the question of women's rights in a way that does not exclude non-theologians;
 - educate children to respect their parents equally, as well as all women in order to eradicate inequality in the future;
 - urge pastors to combine traditional marriage counseling concepts with gender sensitive approaches to foster equal relationships between women and men.

Evaluation of the LWF Youth Program

20. We appreciate the encouragement, support and opportunities given by the LWF Council. We urge member churches to make use of the youth Council members to interpret and continue the work, include representatives in LWF-related activities at the regional-national level and facilitate actions, information and cooperation.
21. We reviewed the activities of the LWF Youth Desk from 1990 to 1997 and appreciated its efforts to interpret and implement the 1990 PAYC recommendations. Concerns were raised regarding long range planning, North-South balance and program implementation. We support the continuation of the internship programs.
22. We therefore suggest to the LWF as well as to the Youth Desk to:
 - evaluate concerns with regard to staff overload and urge the setting of priorities appropriate to staffing;
 - provide opportunities for the regional youth Council members to serve as consultants to the Youth Desk;
 - build and maintain relationships with regional youth networks. The problem has been the constant turnover in the national church youth leadership;
 - turn energy from publishing the Youth Directory to developing new forms of connecting youth including among others the Internet and the World Wide Web;
 - organize and encourage youth leadership training in pre-Council meetings;
 - hold an evaluation of the 1997 PAYC in early 1998.

Conclusion

23. As we discussed the results of the work in different working groups it became clear that, whatever the starting issue was, many strong feelings were common to all participants:
 - *Education* is needed to defeat illiteracy and to place people in equal positions for debate about human rights issues. Education about our Lutheran faith equips us to more effective dialogue with other faiths.
 - There is also a need to strengthen *communication* as the most powerful way to express the needs of the communion.
 - The understanding of *mission* must be seen from the perspective of the people who receive it as well as from the perspective of those who proclaim it so as to promote better relationships between the churches.
 - We recognize the utter violation of *human rights* taking place in different forms in all our regions. As Christians we are called to witness through words and especially through actions, in order to strive for justice, peace and the integrity of creation.
24. Each person is an essential part of the body of Christ and therefore we must involve everyone, including youth, within the community of all believers. It is imperative to find ways for the Communion to express itself in reality. Therefore, youth must be accepted as valuable and essential members at all different levels of decision making in the Federation including their full participation in the Executive Committee. The contribution of youth through biblical interpretation, worship and liturgy, regional gatherings, national and international conferences has been a revitalizing force from which the LWF has gained considerably and can certainly be further promoted.

THE LWF 2000 AND BEYOND

One of the tasks given to the PAYC participants by the Assembly Planning Committee was to present a vision about the LWF in the year 2000 and beyond in a form of a thematic plenary at the LWF Ninth Assembly in Hong Kong. The content of this presentation was outlined by a working group and a full script of the presentation was finalized in two plenary sessions during the PAYC in Bangkok. The script was presented in a shortened form also to the Assembly participants as Exhibit 11.4. The PAYC report contains the original full version of the script.



Youth presentation at the LWF Ninth Assembly in Hong Kong 8-16 July 1997

We, the youth delegates from all over the world, would like to welcome you here after this exciting and intensive week.

LWF 2000 and Beyond - a presentation we have been asked to do about how we as young people feel and what we expect. We want to share our visions of the next century and beyond. Excitement, expectations and mixed feelings are in the air, but also hope. The youth Pre-Assembly in Bangkok was a very special experience for many of us. During that week we felt again and again what it means to be part of this communion. A communion that is diverse and feels very strange at time but yet having one very important thing in common - the belief in Jesus Christ. This has united us whenever we were working, praying or discussing with one another. One part of our work is this presentation. We hope we will be able to share some of our feelings with you tonight. Now we would like to invite you to see and share our visions. You may be an active or passive participant, whatever is most comfortable for you.

For we cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard. (Acts 4:20)
So what have you seen?

I was present when thousands of people held each others hands standing on the streets, lighting candles and praying. I was tight in my throat and overwhelmed by emotions when the Berlin wall came down and the borders were opened.

I have seen how a courageous but peaceful demonstration on Tiananmin Square in Beijing was beaten down with violence. I saw young people in desperation - people who only hours earlier were filled with hope and optimism.

For we cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard.
So what have you heard? I have heard the voices of street children in Brazil.

For we cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard.

So why can't we be silent? These words will be fulfilled in Hong Kong. I cannot be silent for I felt God's creative and dynamic spirit when we as young people from all over the world gather and experience communion. Despite the overload of problems we face as youth today, we are not silent, but have the power of witnessing to life.

These are strong reasons for young people to speak but there are also many who remain silent. Maybe they lack the self-confidence in front of a large audience or they are afraid of opponents. Maybe they are insecure whether they have the right to speak, but they know that something is going wrong. They don't know the right words and are afraid of maybe not choosing the appropriate ones.

We are not here tonight to be silent. There will be loud and silent moments. Enthusiasm and critical remarks will be very close to each other but nevertheless we invite you to participate. Young people are God's witnesses through events that they experience. On their search for spirituality many things influence them. There is a lot of diversity and variety in the church:

- small parish where everybody knows each other.
- a project or an exchange where two parishes from different countries work together.
- a meeting for bible studies
- women's groups who bring changes and different perspectives
- people who want to celebrate
- board members to talk about finances and structures
- a service
- people who have something on their minds and take action.

For us this is not always so clear. There seems to be many controversial view points and we are not always able to identify each other's needs. It seems to us that we are not as Melancthon said: "born to mutual exchange," our resentments keep us at a distance. We do not want to exclude and we also do not want to be excluded. We'll show you our vision.

Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but be an example for the believers in your speech, your conduct, your love faith and purity. (1 Timothy 4:12)

Vision of an inclusive church

We have a vision! We dream of a future where women and youth celebrate equality in each and every avenue of life. We have a vision of youth and women leadership in every expression of the church, the Lutheran World Federation, our National Church expressions, and our congregations! In the church of tomorrow and beyond, each person, male and female, old and young, together we will all be valued equally. Together, we are called to gather at the Lord's Table.

We have a vision! We dream of a future where each and every church in this communion will ordain women to the ministry of Word and Sacrament. We also dream of a future when our churches will embrace both feminist theology and liberation theology and will no longer be limited to a traditional male-orientated interpretation of theology.

We have a vision! We dream of a future where every church will celebrate in its calling to be a safe place and an inclusive church. Called to be inclusive, the church will accept and include all the children of God so that no voice, *no voice* is lost and each person has his/her own share of participation in the body of Christ!

We have a vision! We dream of a future where youth will be empowered to be active participants in our worship life and church services! No longer will youth be silent! Youth will claim their voice and freely exercise their gifts of the Holy Spirit! Together, the young and the old will lead in a renewal of the present liturgical life. Laity and clergy will together lead worship. Modern instruments, dancing, new songs in a new style, and culturally sensitive and culturally appropriate liturgies will reshape our praise, worship and thanks to God!

We have a vision! We dream of a future where we will no longer dance independently, but join in one dance of many rhythms and styles. Together, our dance will be a dance of many colors, many gifts and many voices! We will dance in the light of a new day, in the light of God!

Interpretative dance accompanied by the song:

We Are Marching in the Light of God.

Vision of Ecumenism

We are different denominations. Split up and divided by the conflicts of history by the conflicts that tear us apart today. We are different. Separated by our understanding of our faith, of our way of worship. And yet, somewhere there is pain. A yearning, a feeling that perhaps we should be one.

It is said that it is a holy communion when people gather in Jesus' name - at least it is supposed to be. A communion where there is a reign of transcending love and peace. But I don't feel it. Where is it? I still crave for perfection - for true unity. Is there something wrong with me or with the communion?

If I say there is something wrong with our communion do I become guilty? I was never taught to feel at ease with someone from another denomination - to accept others with an open heart.

I want to meet the other eye-to-eye, heart-to-heart to spread together the message of love throughout the world so that we will see our different traditions and understandings as a source of richness and strength.

I have met other Christians I have sung songs with them and praised the Lord. But I am confused. We are so divided in our practice. What is right? What is the best? Baptism by sprinkling or immersion? As an adult or as an infant? I dream about the day when we accept each other's baptism. We are all crucified with Jesus and he accepts us all. I dream about the day when we can all accept each other.

I have a vision that one day we will come to the Lord's table together. Jesus calls all the burdened and weak and all those with a broken heart. And yet we exclude each other from his table because we have different understandings. Are we so self-content and complete within ourselves that we do not need the others? I have a vision that we will understand that we are one body which hurts if some limb is excluded.

I have a vision, that we will celebrate our unity in reconciled diversity. That we will see our different traditions and understandings as a source of richness and strength.

Each one alone is too weak to serve in the world. Together we will bring Christ's light. Together we will bring Christ's love and peace and offer a place of community and love.

We are different - but we are one in Christ.

Song: Bind Us Together, Lord

Vision of Equal Partnership North-South-East-West

We, the youth, dream to see the regional unity and equality of all people through Christ. As we are all children of God we would like to vision a 'church' which is not divided on a regional, racial, gender and economic basis but united in Christ as his body. Our vision is to see a 'church' which is not always dependent on and dictated by another church which is economically and politically well off. But rather a church which strives to be economically independent and enjoys equality among others - a universal church which recognizes linguistic, racial and regional differences but enjoys unity in Christ. So that there is no more regional or economical divisions among churches but rather unity, no more racial or gender discrimination in the churches but rather equality, hope, joy and oneness of faith in Christ. Let our visions come true, by forgiving and forgetting our divisions and differences and joining our hands to work for it.

MY VISION CALL

In the northern corner of the world, the spirit of mission came to thought.....

The mission came to Africa. It came to Latin America. It is in Asia. It is all over.

The mission's vision is clear:" Go out and make disciples of all the Nations, in the name of the Triune God".

The string between North and South came to Life. The string now tensioned....

It is no more what it is supposed to be. Something is wrong! Equality is missing, Cooperation is being looked for.
WILL THAT EVER BE?

My vision calls for it to be. My vision calls for Equality. My vision calls for Cooperation. My vision calls for Understanding. My vision calls for Contextualization.

Song:

Be song of praise in prison
For worried be relief
Be power of the people

Be budding of the leaf

Be haven for the hunted
Be riches for the ragged
For wanderers be a stream
Be the vision, be the dream

Be song of hope in horror
For hungry be the bread
Be freedom for the captives
Be morning light ahead

Be solace in the sorrow
Be fragrance of tomorrow
In dungeons be a gleam
Be the vision, be the dream

Chorus:

We have a weapon
a weapon in the struggle
That no one can destroy
that nothing can resist
be the dream.



Painting a poster for the youth presentation on
LWF 2000 and beyond

Guided Meditation

We will now take you through a meditation experience. This will be familiar to some of you. It will be new to others, but this practice is not new. It has been used in Christianity for centuries and it continues to be used in some of our member churches. We ask you to be open, to respect the stillness, and the silence of this time. This is different from New Age or religious cults for we are quieting ourselves to allow the Holy Spirit to speak to us. Everyday life keeps us so busy. We have to listen to so many different needs. Are we really able to listen? We speak so much. We give ourselves no rest and no time to be still, to empty ourselves. We have to learn to trust ourselves.

"Be still, and know that I am God!" - Psalm 46:10

We invite you to join as you feel comfortable. You are welcome to sit comfortably in your chair and close your eyes if you so choose.

Breath in deeply. Inhale and exhale. When you are inhaling, say within yourself, "Jesus Christ".

When you are exhaling, say within yourself, "Have mercy on me". *(pause)*

You are here. Silence surrounds you. How do you feel? What keeps your thoughts busy? *(pause)*

You feel like a vase - filled to the top. Not a single drop of water can be added. Where are your dreams, your visions, your hopes? *(pause)*

They are covered down in the dark. Try to empty yourself to make room for what God wants to tell and show us.

Visions are part of God's plan. Let your breath go out. Inhale and exhale deeply.

God comes, takes the vase, turns it upside down. Water flows out slowly. Try to empty yourself to give room for what God wants to tell and show us. Visions are part of God's plan. Let your breath go out. Inhale and exhale deeply.

God comes, takes the vase, turns it upside down. Water flows out slowly. There is not a single drop left. You are empty. *(pause)*

Now you can be filled with fresh and cool water that brings new life. Imagine - you enter a bright room. You are in a church. What can you see? There is a colorful crowd. There are people, young and old, of different races, speaking different languages, the weak and the strong, the rich and the poor, Christians of different confessions, people of different faiths. There are flowers all over. The light makes them grow. The colors the people wear are the same as the flowers. It is a beautiful picture.

People are celebrating. They dance, they sing, they share their lives and cultures. African drums ring out the call to worship.

An old woman comforts a young man, a child speaks God's blessing, a young boy walks with an old man in a wheelchair, the pastor invites all to take part in the worship. Who else is present? What else do you see? Which sounds fill the room? *(pause)*

Let's join with one voice and create harmony with our differences. Hum a note, any note that is comfortable for you. *(pause for humming)*

Now slowly come back. Remember that you are in the plenary. When you are ready, open your eyes and refocus on your surroundings.

CONCLUSION

Bible reading: Acts 2:17

Brothers and sisters, I'd like you to share very briefly with the brother or sister near you: what is the vision you have of the LWF 2000 and beyond? For this brief exchange you'll have 10 minutes and please write down your visions on the green leaves you have received when you entered in the plenary. We ask you to leave them at the exit doors as you go out. The leaves will be attached to a symbolic tree which will remind us of our visions throughout the remaining time of the Assembly. I'd like 2 or 3 people of the plenary to share their visions of the LWF 2000 and beyond with all of us.

Bible reading: Mark 4:1-6 (The Parable of the Sower)

At times the visions fell on rocky soil. They did not have much soil so they are choked. Visions can help us to gain courage, power and hope. If we don't have any visions left, our future will be empty and without hope. I think visions have to be taken care of. You have seen our visions and maybe some of these are also yours. They are known to you. Allow these visions to have some room in you. Where do you find room in your church to bring in your visions? You might be the water that small plants need to grow or the light that they need to live. You might take care of them so that there is no rock in their way. How can you contribute to it that these visions so that they can grow - to be strong and big and bring fruit some day?

Now we would like to invite you to a time of stillness.

Thuma mina,... Send me Jesus,... Lead me,... Fill me,... I will go Lord...

CULTURAL EVENING

Meeting of different cultures is always an important part of all international meetings. PAYC participants considered the Cultural Evening one of the most enriching and impressing parts of the program. What the discussions in the plenary couldn't do the manifestation of our identity and cultural roots did by creating a functioning communication platform for mutual exchange.



Indian dance



Africa



Asia



Japanese tea ceremony



Latin America



Europe



North America

CLOSING OF CONFERENCE

Thuma mina - Send me Lord, this was the leading motif of the closing worship prepared by a group of the PAYC participants. Rather celebrating the end of the PAYC, the worship was a symbolic sending off from our preparations in Bangkok to the work of delegates and stewards at the Assembly in Hong Kong. We were giving thanks for the great gift of communion which we have experienced during our days in Bangkok. But we also prayed that the feeling of togetherness would continue to strengthen us in the different roles for which we were preparing ourselves in Bangkok. The presiding minister was the Rev. Amy Reuman and the Rev. Gertrud Toesing was preaching. The singing was accompanied by the music band of the local church.



SERMON FOR THE CLOSING WORSHIP

John 20:21

Rev. Gertrud TOENSING



The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.
Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters!

I am grateful for this opportunity to be able to share a few thoughts with you in this closing worship. And allow me to begin with a few personal reflections.

I am a white South African standing in front of Lutheran youth from member churches all over the world, all cultures and languages. And yet only two LWF assemblies ago - in Budapest - my church was

suspended from the Lutheran family for not taking a strong enough stand against the system of Apartheid, and even practicing it within its ranks. Apartheid was a whole world view of separateness. It tried to keep separate and keep apart, not only white and black, but also English and Afrikaans, the Indians and those of Malay and mixed race descent, the Zulu and the Xhosa, the Sotho and the Tswana, the Venda and the Shangaan. Each should have their own living area, own schools and practice their own culture in their designated realm. And they had no opportunities outside these well-defined areas, which were in the case of black South Africans pitifully small and poor.

A favorite justification of this system was the story of the Tower of Babel. God, it was said, had himself confused the languages and scattered the nations. It was his will. He intended us to be separate and to protect our identity and cultural heritage by keeping apart from the neighbor who is different. Sadly, this system was in some cases so effective that in my ministry I am regularly shocked about how little many South Africans know about each other.

Many Christians countered this argument of the tower of Babel by saying that we are Christians who live after Pentecost. At Pentecost, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit united people in such a way that they understood each other regardless of what language they were speaking. This showed unmistakably that God wants to overcome divisions between people. Pentecost is an important festival of unity, and we Lutherans, who are often reluctant to speak about the Holy Spirit, should rediscover how many vital elements there are in our teachings of the Holy Spirit.

But Pentecost is easier to preach than to live out. As Christians we live between Babel and Pentecost - sometimes experiencing the one, sometimes the other. And even in this conference we have had elements of both. That differences cause division is natural and human. It is that frustrating feeling of being misunderstood, or of not understanding what the other person is driving at, that makes us want to withdraw - to staying with people from our own country or continent, with people who talk and think like us and share our opinions and values. It is so much easier, less painful and less frustrating. And yet - how much poorer would we be for it.

How much poorer were white South Africans for not being allowed to really appreciate black African culture - always being taught that it would be a threat to their identity and existence, if it were allowed to develop freely! How poor are those people who have never come out of their safe environments where all people think and act like them, people who have never been challenged to see things that they have always taken for granted suddenly in an entirely new light.

It is the Spirit that shakes us up and creates community, that makes us see differences not as obstacles but as great opportunities for enrichment, discovery and mutual support. And I felt the Spirit moving in this conference - shaping a bunch of disparate young individuals into a beautiful community of the people of God. On Thursday night at the cultural evening and rave I stood for a few moments in awe and thought, "Yes, this is the way God

must have intended it when he created his world" and I sent a short prayer up to heaven: "Lord, your people are so beautiful!"

The Holy Spirit welds different people into a unity in Christ - without making them the same. But creating community is not the only thing the Spirit does.

We all love and need community. But community is not an end in itself. Some Christians seem to think so: they gather in a "holy huddle", enjoy each other's company and celebrate the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. And there it ends. But the fellowship of the Holy Spirit is there for a purpose - and this is where we come to another Pentecost text - the text we have heard as gospel reading. These are words spoken by Jesus to his disciples after the resurrection: "Peace be with you! As the Father sent me, I am sending you," and immediately after these words we read, "And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

Community is wonderful and important and we should celebrate and thank God for the opportunity to experience community. But this community is there to give us strength and support for the next step - that step out again. Jesus sends us out giving us his spirit, sends us out to be witnesses in the world. It is the same spirit - the spirit that calls us into community from wherever we come from, and that now sends us on - some of us to Hong Kong, others back to their home to continue to witness to Christ who makes this fellowship possible.

Wherever we are sent out to, - and very definitely in Hong Kong - we will encounter Babel. We will again be confronted with difficulties and obstacles to unity and communion. And yet - we have been sent out with this Spirit which can show that beyond Babel there is Pentecost. And I am sure that we will experience this also in Hong Kong - that we will again have the experience that we are one in Christ and that our differences can be a source of marvel rather than pain, and that we will look in awe at the beauty of that which South Africa's Archbishop Tutu called the "rainbow people of God".

One last thought: Jesus sends us out - into a world of division, pain, violence and suffering. So that we may persevere he gives us his Spirit and he gives us Christian community - to strengthen us and encourage us in a life of service and witness. And Jesus also gives us his peace - both as a vision and as a source of inner strength. Let us take this peace with us to the turbulence of the Hong Kong Conference and back to our homes. Perhaps we can discover here in the East a bit more about what inner peace really can mean - and how it can help us in our daily life. So take this peace of Christ - perhaps with a little Eastern flavor - into your hearts, into the conference in Hong Kong and into your home country and then go and serve the Lord with joy.

Amen.



APPENDICES :

1. TIMETABLE
2. LIST OF PARTICIPANTS
3. PAYC COMMITTEES
4. STATISTICAL INFORMATION



Bangkok city - traditional and modern architecture meet here

Time	June 28 Saturday	June 29 Sunday	June 30 Monday	July 1 Tuesday	July 2 Wednesday	July 3 Thursday	July 4 Friday	July 5 Sat.	July 6 Sun.
08.00	A R R I V A L	Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast	D E P A R T U R E V I S I T S
09.00		Opening Worship in Evangelical Lutheran Church in Thailand starting at 10:30	Bible Study	Greeting from WSCF Bible Study	Bible Study	Bible Study	Bible Study	Closing Worship at 10:00	
10.30			Coffee	Coffee	Coffee	Coffee	Coffee		
11.00			- Greeting from WCC - First Key-note address and discussion	Working Groups	Working groups	Plenary - Vision of Leadership address by LWF/DMD Director - Reports from Groups 1 and 2	Plenary: First reading of the Final Document		
12.30		Lunch and encounter with congregation	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	
14.00			- Greeting form the LITE Director - Second Key-note address and discussion	Working Groups	Afternoon free	Plenary: Reports from Groups 3,4,5	Plenary: Second reading and adoption	Team building for Stewards	
15.30		Transportation to the Hotel at 15:00	Coffee	Coffee		Coffee	Coffee	Coffee	
16.00		Opening Plenary Introduction to PAYC, Adoption Procedures, Opening address by the LWF Youth Secretary	- Appreciating Buddhism- Christianity - Report from the Human Rights Visit	Working groups		Plenary: Report from Group 6 Evaluation and Planning of the Youth Program	Committee for Youth presentation on LWF 2000 Plenary report	Team building for Stewards	
17.30		Regional meetings	Devotion	Devotion		Devotion	Devotion		
18.00		Dinner	Dinner	Dinner		Dinner	Dinner	Dinner	
20.00 to max.22.00		- Introduction to LWF Assembly by LWF Deputy General Secretary - Election of Committees - Introduction of participants	Meeting of committees	Meeting of committees		Cultural Evening	Discussion to the Youth presentation on LWF 2000		

APPENDIX 2

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS **LWF PRE-ASSEMBLY YOUTH CONFERENCE (PAYC)** **IN BANGKOK, THAILAND, JUNE 29 - JULY 5, 1997**

Voting participants:

DEL - Delegate to the LWF Ninth Assembly in Hong Kong
STE - Steward to the LWF Ninth Assembly in Hong Kong
COUNCIL - LWF Council Member representing youth
REGION - Participant from the region
OBSERVER - Observer from the Lutheran Church in Australia

Non-voting participants:

RESOURCE - Resource Person
AD HOC COM - Member of the Ad Hoc Planning Committee
ECUMENICAL GUEST - Guests from Ecumenical Youth Organizations

Staff:

LOCAL STE - Local stewards
LOCAL COORD - Local Coordinator
INTERPRETER - Interpreters working at the PAYC
COOPTED STAFF - Staff from a member church working with LWF staff
STAFF - Staff from the Lutheran World Federation in Geneva
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APPENDIX 4

STATISTICAL INFORMATION

Total number of participants invited:	151
- youth delegates	78
- stewards	52
- Council members representing youth	7
- participants from the region	3
- ecumenical guests	2
- resource persons	7
- observer	1
- local coordinator	1
Total number of participants attending:	130
- youth delegates	63
- stewards	48
- Council members representing youth	6
- participants from the region	3
- ecumenical guest	1
- resource persons	7
- observer	1
- local coordinator	1
- female:	73
- male:	57
- ordained:	17
- lay:	113
Others attending:	
- interpreters	8
- local stewards	10
- LWF staff	7
- coopted staff	1
- press	2